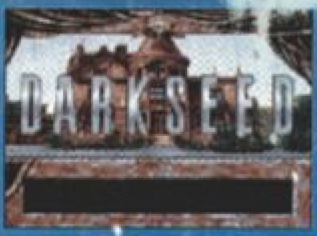
OVER ONE HUNDRED HOT GAMES REVIEWED INSIDE

GIGER'S DARK SEED
Mr Alien has written a computer game! (Well, sort of)



ISSUE 55
April 1992
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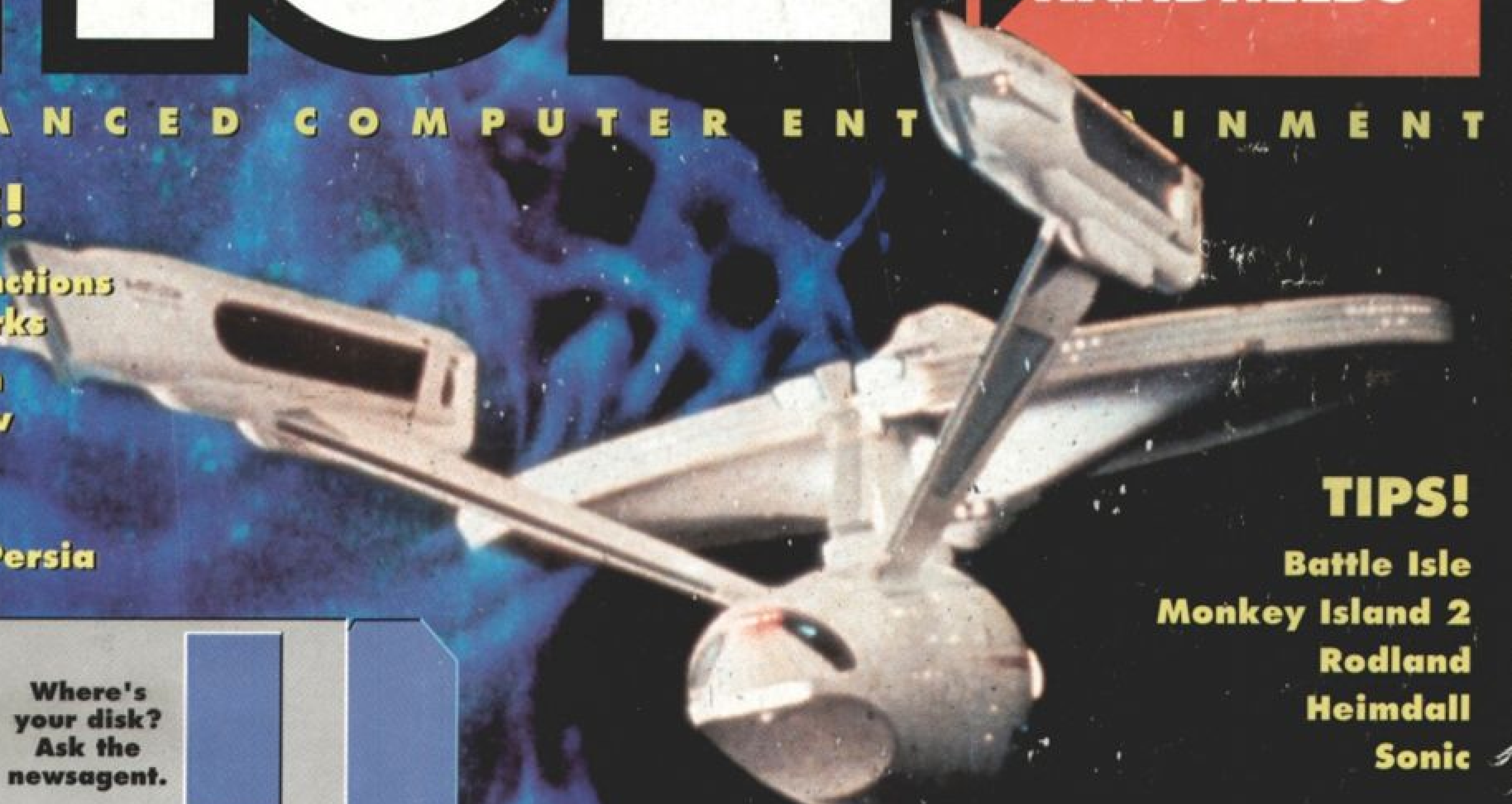
ACE

ADVANCED COMPUTER ENT INMENT

THE ESSENTIAL GAMES BUYER'S GUIDE
- AMIGA
- PC
- ST
- CONSOLES
- HANDHELDS



INSIDE!

- Higher Functions In The Works
- The Return of The New Originals
- Gameboy Prince of Persia

TIPS!

- Battle Isle
- Monkey Island 2
- Rodland
- Heimdall
- Sonic

Where's your disk? Ask the newsagent.

ACE

SPACE CRUSADE
Play the entire first level of Gremlin's latest AMIGA smash.

OZONE
A complete ST game from Shareware gurus Goodman Enterprise.

HEIMDALL
PC owners' chance to play the infamous axe throwing section of Core's Viking romp.

DISK 2

Tri-Format Disk compatible with
- AMIGA
- IBM PC
- ATARI ST

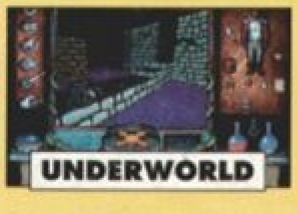
Intergalactic PC Exclusive!

STAR TREK

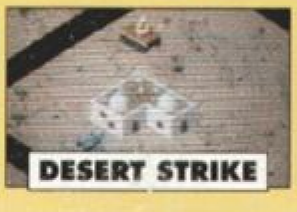
Electronic Arts Take the Enterprise Initiative!

SIX REALLY BIG REVIEWS FOR SIX REALLY BIG GAMES

STAR TREK


UNDERWORLD

PARASOL STARS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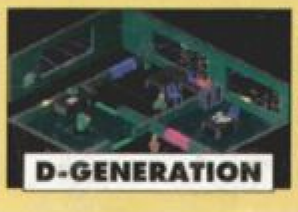

D-GENERATION

SIM ANT

IT'LL BE WORTH I

(And 32,767 o

The wait will be over on June 6th.

ITS WAIT IN GOLD.

7other colours)

SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
X
A
Y

ACE

No.55 APRIL 1992

THE END

What's this? "The End"? But you haven't even *started* to read the issue yet. So what on Earth can we be on about? Well, unfortunately, this entire issue marks the end of the swirling vortex of atoms and ideas known as ACE Magazine.

After a thoroughly good innings of some four-and-a-half years, a considerably longer period, you may realise, than many wars last (apart from notable exceptions, like the Hundred Years War of course), ACE's day has finally come.

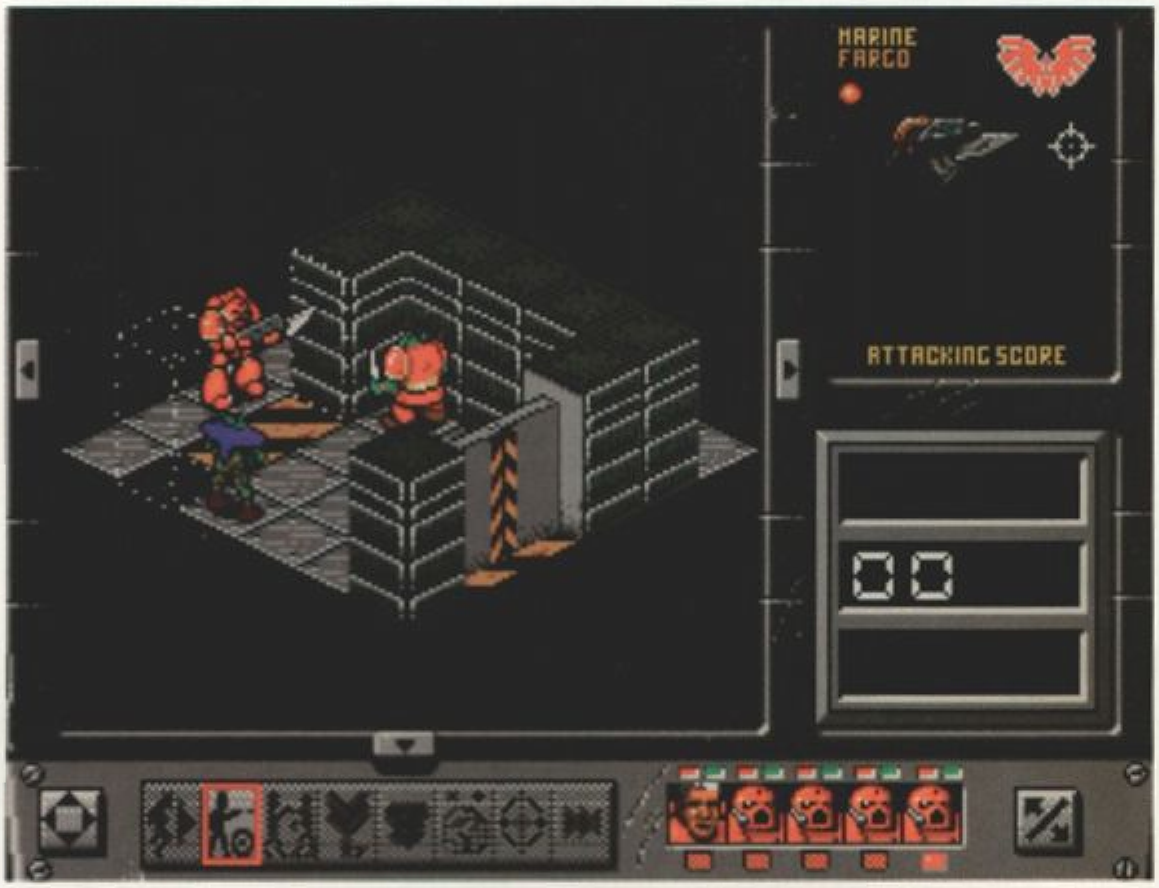
And why, exactly, has this happened? Alas, it's just a reality of the ever-changing blink-and-you've-missed-it world of leisure computing and the magazines which feed off it.

It's time to move on to pastures new, spend more time with our families, do all those solo projects we never had time for, or something.

It's a shame, but that's the way the cookie crumbles.

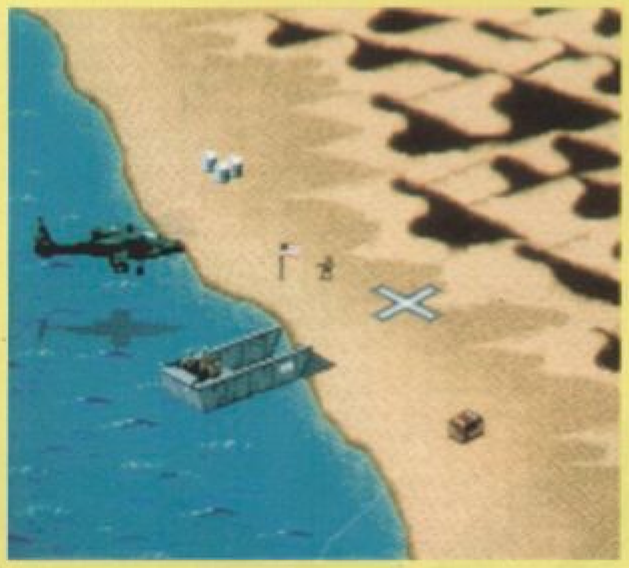
So if you're of a morbid disposition, you can read all about it on page 82. Otherwise, settle back and enjoy the issue. You won't see its like again.

J.D.



7 This month, Amiga owners get a first exclusive play of Gremlin's superlative Space Crusade, while PC players are treated to a first-ever go of Heimdall's axe-chucking sequence. And it's all thanks to our lovely coverdisk...

16 Gary Whitta's Previews are packed full of more goodness and fibre than six pounds of big potatoes. So if you've got any common sense, let your fingers do the walking to the pages that matter.



WHAT??!! A Megadrive game getting the clamoured-for 6-Page screentest treatment? Yes. In a fit of generocity brought on by the coming of summer, we've gone and given Electronic Art's latest release - a Megadrive *shoot-'em-up* no less - a storming 6-Page review. And what in God's name possessed us to do such a thing? The fact that it's simply excellent, that's what. So whether you're a confirmed Megadrive nut or simply curious, turn to page 40 to see what the fuss is all about.

Editor Jim Douglas. *Deputy Editor* David Upchurch. *Art Editor* Jim Willis. *Staff Writer* Gary Whitta. *Contributors* Rik Haynes, Gary Penn, Steve Cooke. *Photography* Edward Park. *Advertising Manager* Mike "Dammit! Dammit all to Hell and Back!" Wills. *Advertising Production* Esther Rodd, Remzi Salih. *Publisher* Gary Williams. *Subscriptions* Apex House, Oundle Road, Peterborough, PE2 9NP. Tel: 0733 898100. *Colour Origination* Becky Wecky's In House Scanning Services. *Typesetting* Pre-Press Ltd. *Distribution* EMAP Frontline, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2TR. *Printing* Severn Valley Press, Caerphilly. © EMAP Images 1992 No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publishers.
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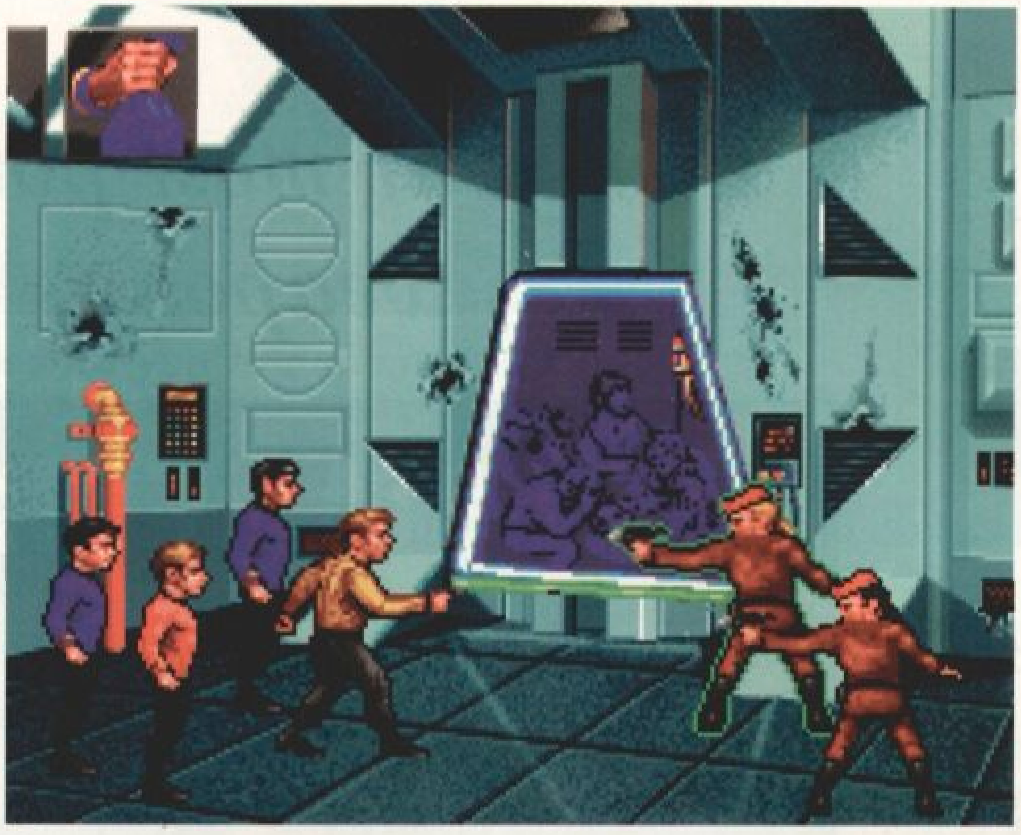
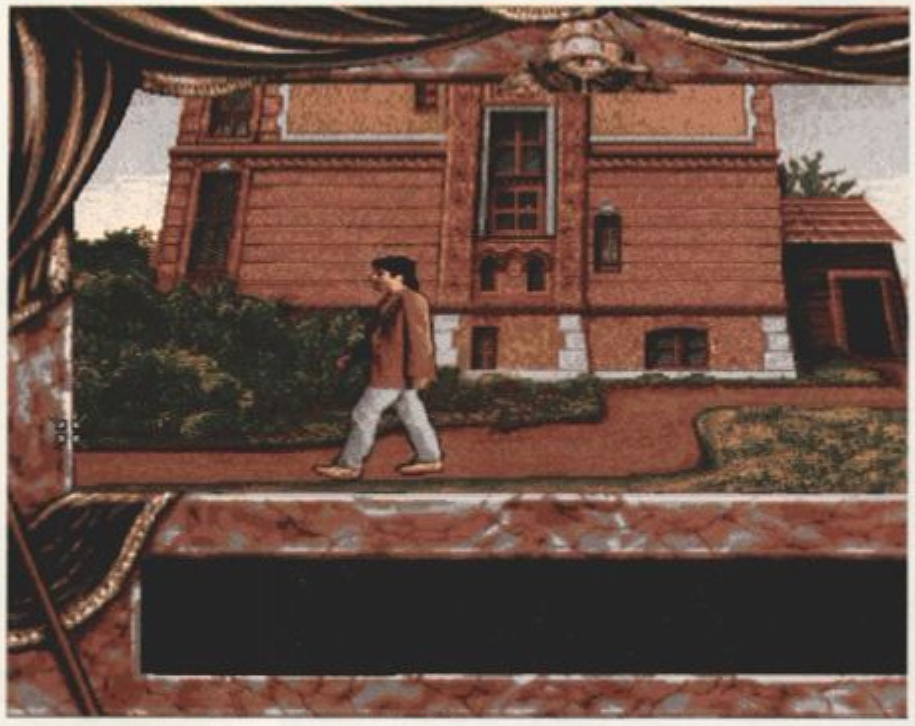
The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long.

contents

20 Bullfrog first came up with the idea od BOB over a pizza after completing Powermonger. Now see how far they've got.

22 He may be able to draw pictures of nudie aliens with a brush, but how will H R Giger cope with DPaint III? Dark Seed - In The Works





60 Star Trek - The 25th Anniversary is one of the most entertaining and fully rounded games we've seen all year. Read all about it in our Screentest.

78 The New Originals - This month the Bitmap Bros tell us what they would have done with Tempest.

7 Disk! - How to use the thing on the front. **10 News** - All the rumours that are fit to print. **16 Previews** - Gary Whitta and a load of exclusives. **20 In the Works** - BOB from Bullfrog and Dark Seed from H.R Giger **29 Screentest 70 New Originals** - Tempest, Bitmap style. **78 Public Domain** - Cheapskates' Paradise **82 Tearjerking Farewell**. **83 Reviews Directory.** Last month's pinks reprint

(STILL) THE BEST REVIEWS ON THE PLANET

REVIEWS

30
Sim Ant

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be an ant? No. We didn't suppose so for a second. But it's interesting thought. No, really. It is. So interesting, in fact, that Maxis have done a whole game about it.

36
Underworld

Mix the deep adventuring thrills of Dungeon Master and the graphic excitement of Wing Commander and you're certain to be looking at a winner. At least, so Mindscape hope...

42
Desert Strike

Budda-Budda-Doom! Amiga owners unwilling to wait for Strangeways forthcoming Apocalypse may be most tempted to purchase a Megadrive just for the chance of *seeing* this awesome shoot-'em-up.

48
D-Generation

No, not the top BBC show with Brucie and that girl with the legs in it. That's *The* Generation Game. *This* Generation game is all about crazy puzzles on the PC. And we just love it.

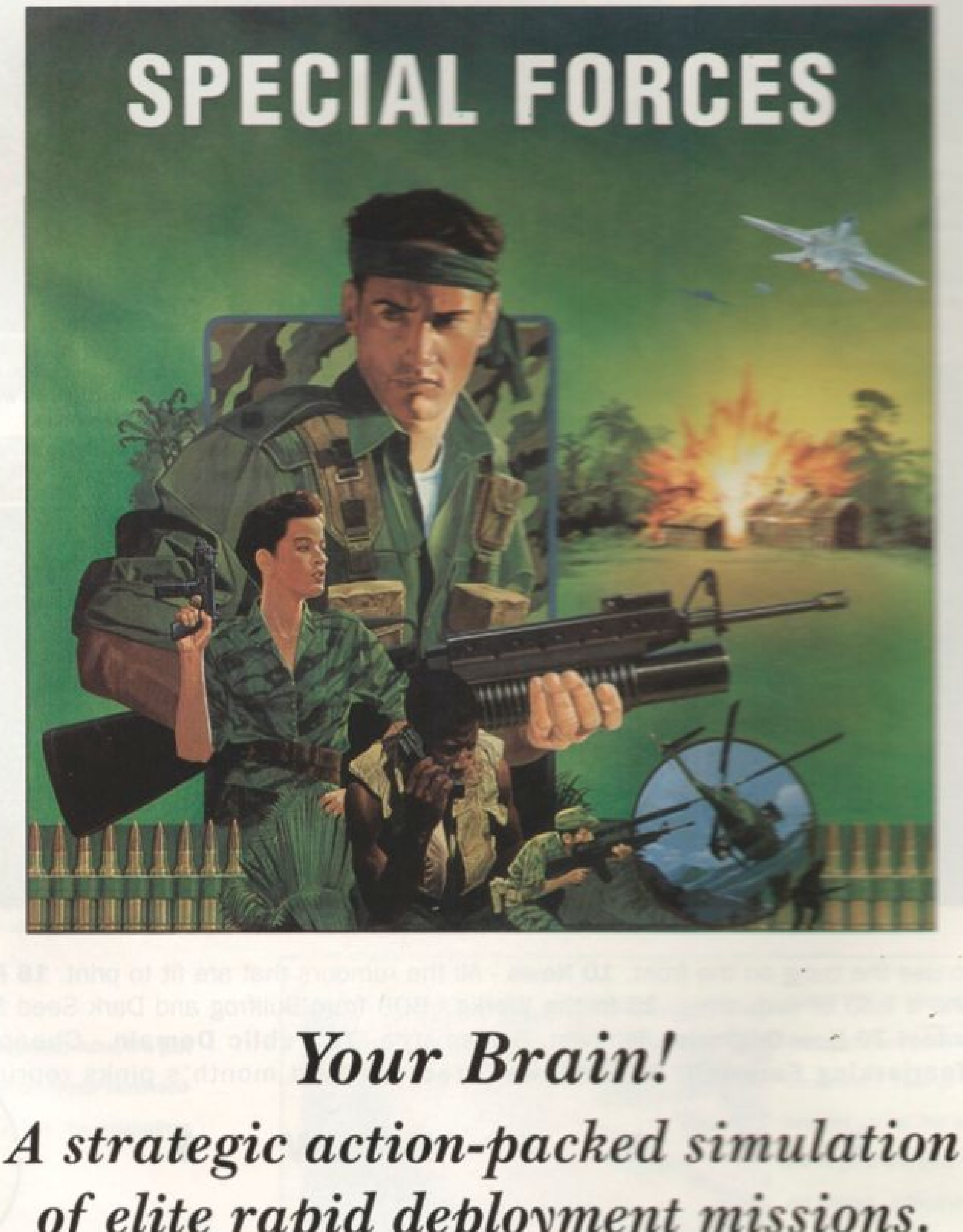
54
Parasol Stars

Bub and Bob blew bubbles in Bubble Bobble to battle the barmy baddies. Right after, they ran rings around rampant rotters with their Rainbows. And now they have some umbrellas.

60
Star Trek

To baldly go. Captain's Log. Picking off Klingons. Vulcan Hell. She cannae take it. It's life, Jim, but not as we know it. etc, etc. Slip into a nostalgia pod and travel with us to the land of wobby sets.

Pick your most powerful weapon...



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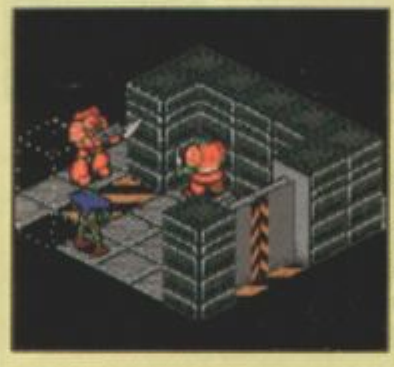
ACE DISK 2

Have I got some treats in store for you this month! For Amiga nuts there's a complete level of Gremlin's brillaint bug-hunt Space Crusade and IBM PC owners can get their jollies lobbing axes at small girls in a scene from Core's Heimdall. So much to say, so little space to say it in...

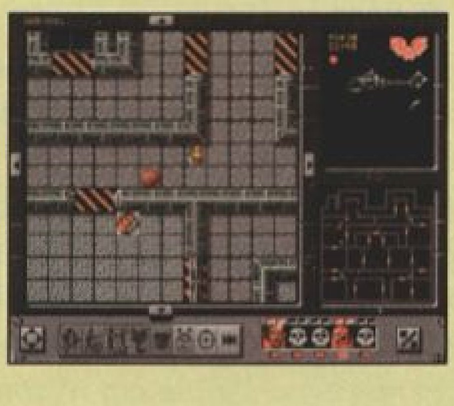
SPACE CRUSADE



Calling all Aliens fans! If you liked that totally mega stalk n' slash SF film then you'll love Gremlin's Space Crusade. You play a rock 'ard space commander leading a troupe of five hard-as-nails marines through wrecked spaceships populated by all manner of hideous alien creeps.

For your delectation and entertainment Gremlin have kindly provided ACE readers with a complete demo of the first level - the final game will have a fantastic twelve. The aim here is simple: find the massive ED209-like Dreadnought and destroy it. And remember: Get them before they get you!

HAVING A FUNNY TURN



Space Crusade is played in turns. At the beginning of the turn a random effect occurs to keep you on your toes and then the players can perform their actions. First the player performs his actions, then the alien player (the computer) performs his. In his turn a player may move and/or fire with all, some or none of the marines under his control. Bear in mind that if an icon is shaded that means it can't be used by the selected marine that turn.

Action Window

The big square window is where all the action takes place. Normally you view the ship in 2D, while moving your marines and so forth, but it switches to exciting isometric 3D when combat occurs.

Status Window

To the upper-right of the action window is the status panel which gives information on the currently-selected marine, including health (red blobs for each life point) and weapon carried. Each weapon has a different effect. Again, due to lack of space I can't give all the details here - you'll have to find out what they do by trial and error.

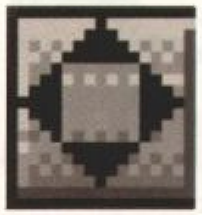
Mini-Map Window

Situated to the left of the main window and below the status window, this normally displays a mini-map of the whole ship, complete with blobs for the marines and the aliens. However, select the special order or equipment icons and this window changes to show the things available. Also, during combat this display shows the attack and defence ratings scored by the two combatants.

ACE
SPACE CRUSADE
Play the entire first level of Gremlin's latest AMIGA smash.
HEIMDALL
PC owners' chance to play the infamous axe throwing section of Core's Viking romp.
DISK 2

ICON SING A RAINBOW...

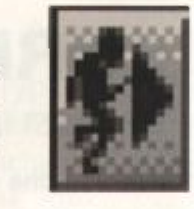
All the marines are controlled via a simple point-n'-click mouse interface. To activate an icon and select things click with the left mouse button. To cancel an active icon click with the right button. Geddit? Anyway, here are those icons in full.



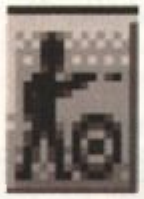
Explore Icon

Click here and you can scroll freely around the ship's deck using the mouse. Alternatively click on the arrows around the edge of the action window.

Move Icon

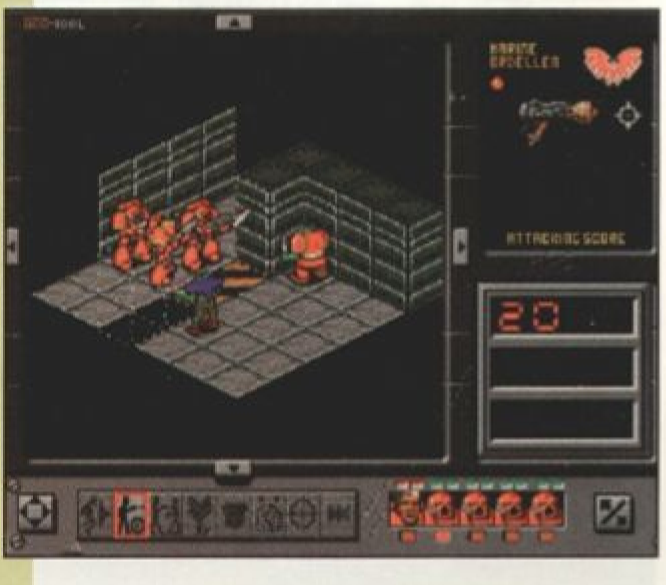


This icon is used to move the marines around. When squares where the marine can move to will be highlighted - click on one.



Fire Icon

This icon lets the marine fire his weapon. The squares in range will be lit up in yellow - click on one, preferably with an alien in it!



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ACE DISK 2

Hand-to-Hand Combat Icon

Use this icon to engage in some hand-to-hand combat with any creatures on squares adjacent to your marine. As before, select the icon then select an alien.

Special Orders Icon

At the start of each turn the player has the opportunity to play a special order. Click here to use it. (There's isn't enough space to go into what each does here, I'm afraid - see if you can work it out yourself!)

Special Equipment Icon

Each teams of marines is equipped with some extra-special equipment that can be called into play. See if you can work out what it all does.

Open Door Icon

When a marine is next to a shut door it can be opened using this icon. Bear in mind that doors open automatically if moved through.

Scan Ship Icon

Click here to scan the nearby deck areas and reveal any skulking alien blips.

Next Go Icon

When you've finished your turn click here to let the alien player have its.

Marine Icons

Click here to switch between controlling the five different marines. The two lights indicate whether the marine has already moved or fired or both. You can only perform each action once with each marine per turn.

2D/3D Icon

Toggles between the 3D and 2D views.

GETTING GOING...

AMIGA

Simply slap the ACE Coverdisk into your drive slot and Space Crusade will load automatically. A piece of text will be displayed explaining what the game is all about then after a short wait the game will start. Have fun!

IBM PC

Hey-hey! Easy PC! While in your hard drive type MD ACE [Return]to create a directory called ACE. Then type CD ACE [Return] to enter the freshly-made directory. Insert the ACE Coverdisk in your 3.5" floppy drive. Now, assuming that this is drive A type A:ACE [Return] and the game will install automatically onto your hard drive. (If it's drive B then type B:ACE [Return].) Finally, type HEIMDALL [Return] to play......

HEIMDALL

You've heard all the hype, now here's the chance for all you rad PC owners out there in ACE Land to try out the infamous axe-throwing scene from Core's forthcoming Heimdall extravaganza.

The idea is this: you play Heimdall, a right top geezer who's been hitting the ale just a bit too much. (Stick to Lucozade, Heimy, that's my advice!) Anyway, Heimy's taking part in a compo to free a babe from the stocks by cutting the locks of hair holding her captive. But this is no simple nip n' snip operation - Heimy has to throw axes to cut her golden tresses.

The game gives you the option to play using either keyboard or mouse. With the keyboard use the keys A, Z, O and P to move the sight up, down, left and right respectively and hit the space bar to fire. Hit ESCAPE to return to good ol' DOS. Enjoy yo'selves!

SORRY ST-ATE

Sorry all ST fans. Due to a last minute problem with the disk we've had to omit Ozone from the compilation. This occurred after the cover had been sent to the printers, meaning it was impossible to correct the error on the disk label reproduced there. Sorry, sorry, sorry and, once again, sorry!

PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS...

Having trouble with your disk? Well, before you get too irate and start frantically calling the ACE offices check the following:

- Make sure your computer and TV/monitor are all connected up correctly.
- If the disk has been obviously damaged in the post or at the newsagents - i.e. it is bent, broken or otherwise obviously physically damaged - then DO NOT INSERT IT IN YOUR DISK DRIVE!!! ACE Magazine and EMAP Images will not be held responsible for any damage caused to your hardware by damaged disks.
- Hmmm, maybe the disk is faulty. Pop the disk in a padded envelope along with a note explaining your predicament and a 28p stamped self-addressed envelope and send it to:

ACE Cover Disk Returns,
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Merthyr Tydfil,
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However, if you think your problem could be solved by a quick call, then call the ACE Disk Hotline between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. weekdays on (0443) 693233.

- Please remember that whilst ACE makes every effort to check the coverdisk for all known viruses, we can accept no responsibility for possible damage caused by viruses which may have escaped our attention.
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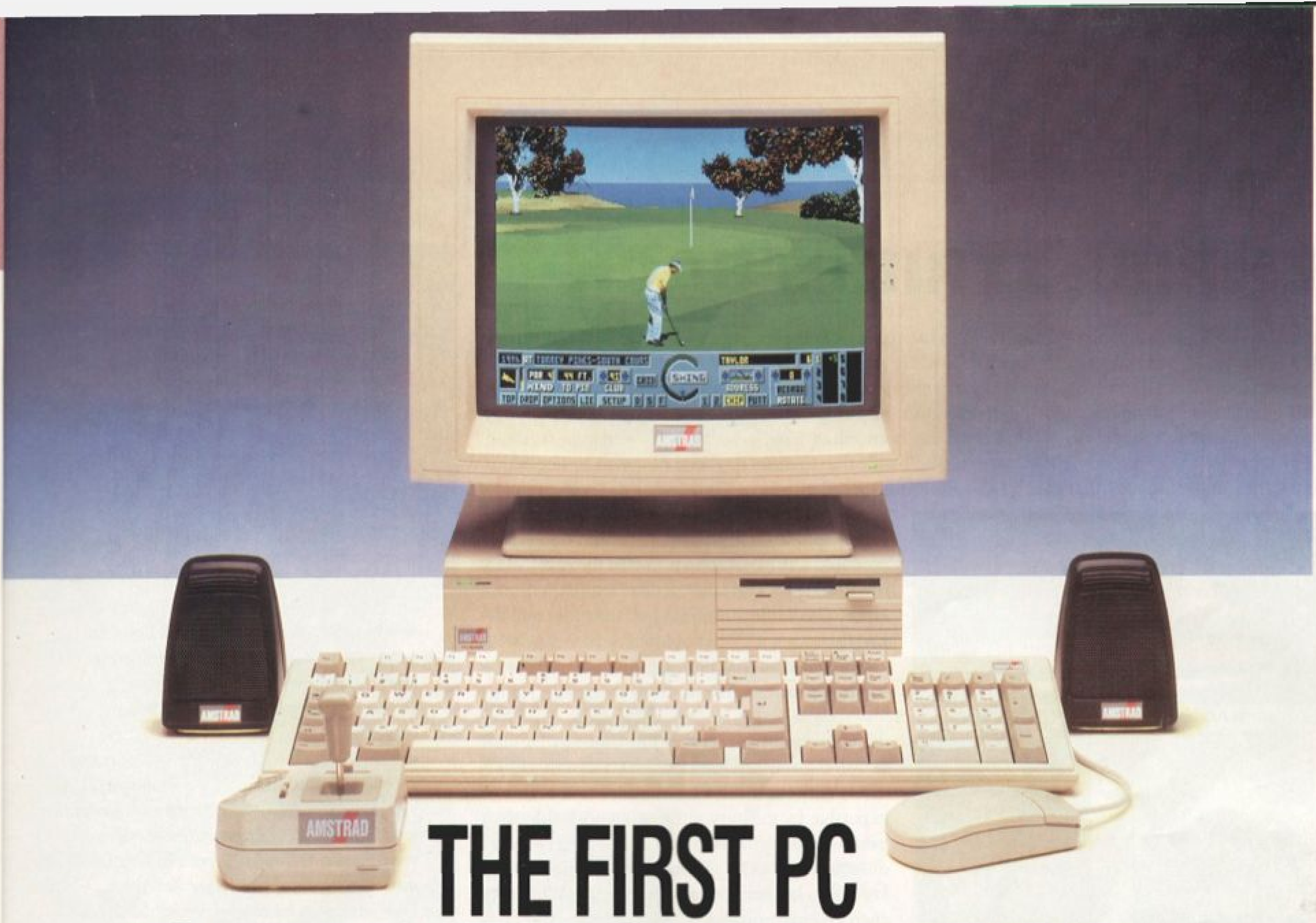

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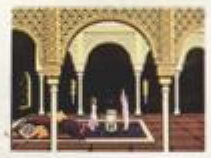
LINKS

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II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NEWS

EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

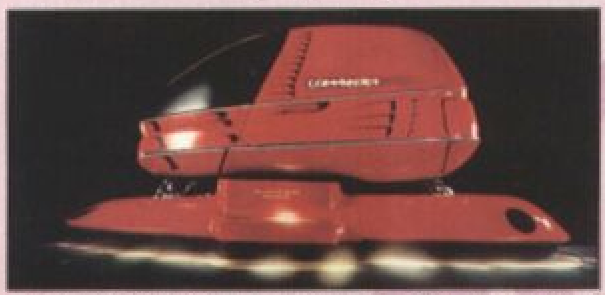
Faced with tough competition from the likes of arcade imagineers Sega and Virtuality, Rediffusion has launched an innovative entry into the bustling world of amusement simulation.

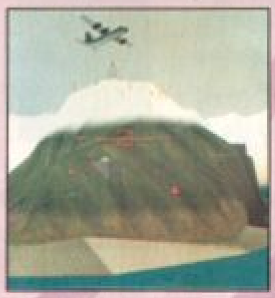
Commander looks like a space shuttle from a cheap science fiction movie. Despite such a drawback, this offbeat two seat capsule boasts high resolution graphics, CD stereo sound and, most importantly, comfortable seats to hopefully prevent repetitive bum injury.

Furthermore, the entertainment software played inside the machine has been designed by Lucasfilm, the Californian company that gave us the stunning special effects in Terminator 2. The San Rafael firm is no stranger to knocking out quality video games, either. Its subsidiary, Lucasfilm Games, has produced a string of superb stuff in the past including Rescue on Fractalus, Ballblazer, Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade and Secret of Monkey Island 2.

Rediffusion is promising a variety of games scenarios for the system, from flying spaceships to commanding a submarine. The Commander demo seen at the recent ATEI event in London featured a standard air combat style of game.

Although the Commander is a result of expertise in military simulation technology, it would comfortably sit inside a shopping centre in downtown Tokyo. Would you believe that, Lucasfilm has already provided the visual feast for such an environment. What a surprise, eh?





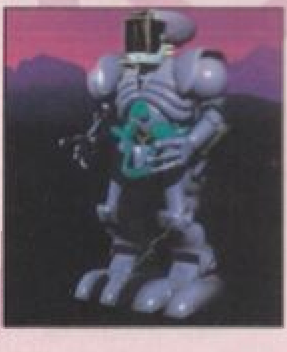
FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

A radical departure from its previous highbrow release Wolfpack, Novalogic is working on a futuristic arcade simulator for the PC and Super NES.

Published by Data East in the USA, Ultrabots: Sanction Earth is a blend of strategy and combat. A proprietary graphics development system has been used to bring remarkable ray-traced 3D-modelled animation to the game.

Reminiscent of the giant war machines seen in Battletech, Ultrabots are mechanised droids which look like humans and a scorpion. The idea is to pilot a squad of these beasts and stop the alien invaders from taking over our lovely planet.

"Ultrabots will delight gamers with its depth of play and amazing graphics," insists Connie Freeman of Data East, "We've taken full advantage of the expanded capabilities that the Super NES provides."



A BRICK TOO FAR

It had to happen sooner or later. Super Mario Bros Lego has arrived! Well, sort of? Byggis from Denmark has previously enjoyed considerable success with a building brick set based around the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. As our kids are currently more interested in the exploits of a New York plumber than a bunch of surf talkin' heroes in a half shell, the Super Mario Gameworld seemed an obvious choice. It's expected to reach British toy shops in the very near future. Prices to be announced.

WORD UP

- **Welcome! Every morsel of this delicious games news has been eagerly certified by the Ministry of most excellent Exclusives. So, tuck in, there's plenty here for all you hungry players...**

- **What's happened to Player Manager 2? We asked Anco the same question. It seems Kick Off 3 is top of the selectors list. "I don't want people to find out what's in Kick Off 3," disclosed an unusually cagey Anil Gupta, "We've done a lot of work on it." Scheduled for release at Easter on Amiga and ST, Kick Off 3 will include such gems as sliding tackles, chip passes and the ability to barge into players. In his spare time, Dino Dini is also revamping the Japanese version of Kick Off on the Super NES. When it comes to sorting out sprites and fighting screen flicker, pioneering British coders can still show these Japs a thing or two, eh?**

- **How would you like to 'star' in a best-selling computer game? Origin has given such an honour to thirteen lucky people in a totally out-of-the-ordinary contest. These ardent Ultima players will actually appear as characters in Ultima VII: The Black Gate. Apparently, thousands of entries came in from around the world. Some winners were automatically chosen with a few specially-marked rune stones included in random Ultima VI packages during 1990. The rest were picked by a casting committee comprised of Richard 'Lord British' Garriott and other members of the Ultima VII design team. The youngest winner was 14-year-old Greg Cato from New Jersey. Housewife Lucy Sarvis, 47, will play a tavern wench in this epic fantasy roleplay adventure. Nobody from Europe was chosen. "Never before have any fans been included to this degree," contends Garriott, "They will be able to see and talk with their alter egos."**

- **Round about now, we like to take a brief** journey past novelty island where you, the reader, discover some completely obscure video game cartridges. This month, our ribs tickled pink at the sight of going deep sea fishing with The Blue Marlin (Hot-B) for the Nintendo Entertainment System. That's right, it's another bait'em-up from the creators of The Black Bass. Very poor indeed, ladies and gentlemen.

- They said it couldn't be done, but Gremlin will include a track editor with Lotus III on the Amiga and ST later this year. Sheffield's most prominent software publisher is forging ahead with other smart racing games, too. Work has already begun on Top Racer 2 for the Super NES (see our 'In The Works' report last month) and don't be surprised to see Lotus Turbo Challenge 2 on the Megadrive and Gamegear in 1993.

- The Blue Marlin from Hot-B is coming soon on Super NES!?!

- We're happy to announce Olympic Gold - Barcelona 1992, the Megadrive and Gamegear hopeful from US Gold, is almost finished. This sporty outing features seven Olympic events including 100m sprint, pole vaulting, 200m freestyle swimming, hammer throw, archery and 1m spring board diving. After all these years, Olympic Gold will be the first game to be sold in North America under the US Gold brand. A conversion of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade onto these two Sega consoles is also on the cards.

- A moment of silence, please, for this sad software obituary. Rise of the Dragon 2, beloved sequel of the Dynamix and Sierra Online graphic adventure, peacefully passed away last month. Rise of the the Dragon 2 is survived by Willy Beamish 2. This bouncing baby should come of age next year.

- Has Arsenal FC offered Thalamus some cash back for an appalling performance this season? The creator of such C64 classics as Delta and Armalyte foolishly bought the computer game rights to this soccer team when they could taste victory and had already booked loads of expenses-paid trips over to Europe. Today, the only way Arsenal will win anything is if they buy a copy of the Thalamus soccer simulation on Amiga, ST or PC. A cross between arcade and management tangles, this untimely production will also incorporate digitised pictures of the squad. Come on you, Spurs!

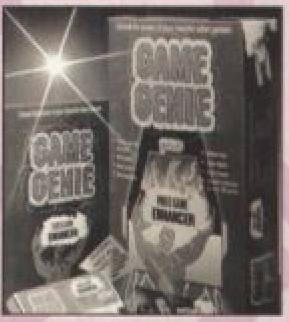
SWEAT AND TEARS

Top brass at Electronic Arts' HQ in California must have enforced a surfin' and beach party ban on their programmers after the launch of the highly desirable Willy Beamish (Dynamix/Sierra Online) and Secret of Monkey Island 2 (Lucasfilm Games). Not before time, eh?

The reason for such a radical decision would be clear. EA is seriously lagging behind on competitive graphic adventures for the PC and star designer Brent Iverson is too busy working on the latest Chuck Yeager flight simulation to care.

Now, after many hours of dedicated overtime have been clocked up, EA thankfully has a system to be proud of. The firm intends to put it to good use, too. The Case of the Serrated Scalpel will be the first in a series of Sherlock Holmes investigative adventures featuring brillo graphics, stonking sounds and a silky interface. Doesn't that sound yummy? Not 'arf. Bet you can't wait for October?

MEAN MACHINE

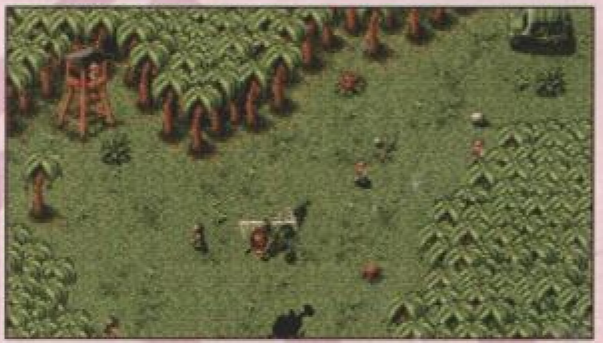


After a quiet start to the year, Megadrive owners have plenty to start saving for in the coming months.

Mindscape is to publish the Megadrive and Super NES adaptions of Gods. This playable platform jaunt, the best Bitmap Brothers effort since Speedball 2, is to undergo a few tweaks in all the right places. For a start, the smoother Megadrive conversion runs at 50 frames per second with 64 colours on screen unlike the original Amiga game which can only muster 17 frames and 16 colours. The Bitmap Brothers are working with respected Essex programming boys Graftgold to create this one. As a bonus, the music changes while Gods is played. It should be out in the 4th quarter.

Virgin Games has put its faith into another Amiga classic. European Club Soccer is the Megadrive variant of the chart-topping Manchester United Europe from Krisalis. Early reports suggest this translation plays a far tougher game of footie and effectively has a tasty 128 colours on screen at the same time. This is made possible through the use of the Megadrive's halfbrite graphics mode for casting shadows on the grass. There's also a password save facility allowing up to eight players to compete in a thrilling cup tournament. In addition, Lynx users can look forward to playing Manchester United Europe before too long.

Finally, Codemasters and Galoob Toys are to introduce a Megadrive version of the Game Genie. This crafty device is used to customise your favourite video games with things like extra speed and infinite lives, making them easier to play and finish. Datel Electronics already has a similar gadget available for around £40.



WAR GAMES

Can it possibly be true? Is Sensible Software really producing a playermatic blend of Megalomania and Lemmings on a handy-size 3.5" floppy disk?

A neat arcade strategy game due for release after Wizkid and Sensible Soccer, Cannon Fodder will make it onto the Amiga and ST ahead of Megalomania II. As you can see from this avalanche of intertainment, the wacky bunch at Sensible Software have no time for holidays or sleep!

With a whole squad of soldiers and associated weaponry under your command, the computer-controlled enemy is just itching to see what you're made of. All your men have different skills, some are able to fly helicopters while others can accurately shoot people. Every time any of these men survive a battle, their rank goes up and another skill is added to the list. The rest of your team is made up of raw conscripts who specialise in being blown apart.

Cannon Fodder is chock full of tricks, troops and traps. How, for example, are you going to move your tank past the quicksand on level 113? Like Megalomania before it, this title makes good use of sampled speech.

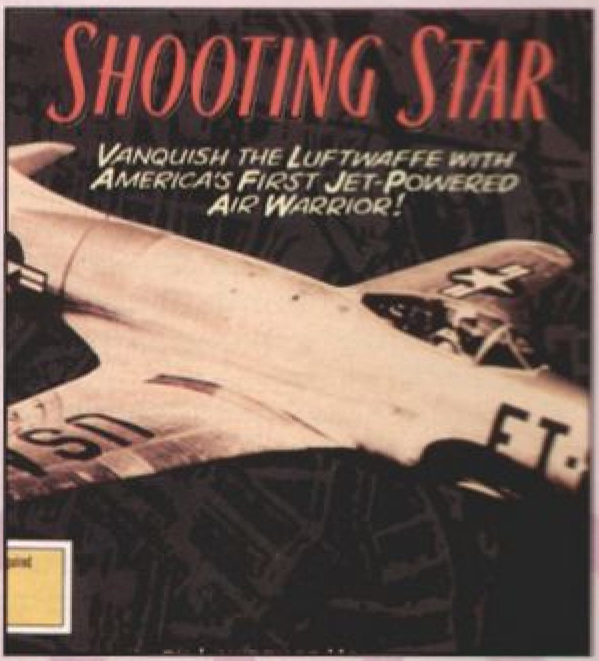
After the recent collapse of Mirrorsoft, Sensible Software is still looking for a publisher...

SKIES THE LIMIT

With the flak and chaff in ample supply, here are five of the latest developments in PC flight entertainment...

- Aces of the Pacific isn't available yet, but Dynamix stroke Sierra Online has already announced the release of RAF in the Pacific. This tally ho datadisk for the long awaited flight simulation from the makers of Red Baron pits the best British fighter designs against the mighty Japanese Zero plane. Alternatively, the WWII:1946 expansion disk takes the conflict a stage further. What if President Truman had decided against launching a devastating atomic attack against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer of 1945? Could the Japs have won a conventional war over friendly skies...

- Over at Lucasfilm Games, programmer Larry Holland has just finished another add-on for Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe. This second Tour of Duty package lets you fly the P-80 'Shooting Star' on treacherous low-level ground strikes against the last remnants of Nazi type targets. It contains three flight school missions, eight historically accurate sorties, five custom affairs and a mission builder to create your own thang.


SHOOTING STAR
VANQUISH THE LUFTWAFFE WITH AMERICA'S FIRST JET-POWERED AIR WARRIOR!

- Nicknamed the 'Yoxford Boys', the 357th Fighter Group was one of the top units during World War II. These guys managed to shoot down almost 700 German planes. Heroes of the 357th from Electronic Arts tests your skills with these famous American aces in seven historical mission types. Will you be able to intercept a V1 Flying Bomb before it reaches England?

- If you prefer futuristic flight frolics, Accolade has a sequel to Star Control waiting patiently in the wings. A hybrid action come role-playing game, Star Control II: The Ur-Quan Masters attempts to pack in 25 distinctly different spacecraft, 500 unique star systems, 'ultra-brilliant' 256-colour graphics of hyperspace, 3D rotating planets, fractal generated surfaces, and, phew, some remarkable digitised music and sound effects. "There are plots within plots," reveals co-author Paul Reiche III, "You can't just blast away at things. You have to ask yourself: what do these Aliens really want?"

- Finally, Microprose is busy working on what could become the best aviation outing on your PC. With such an esteemed pedigree and some truly awesome 3D graphics, the early demonstration of F15 Strike Eagle III is already looking hotter than a Mach 3 afterburner going at full thrust! This enticing game should be ready for takeoff in late 1992.

SWORDS AND SPACERY

Going from strength to strength, W. Industries has recently expanded the range of software available for the Virtuality VR arcade machine.

Legend Quest in Nottingham is anticipated to be the first of many sites offering themed Virtual Reality entertainment for mass consumption.

The first of these adventures is, surprisingly, a swashbuckling adventure where up to four players can cooperate together along a classic storyline. It also features a new voice synthesizer, the ability to save games in progress and, unbelievably, a virtual sword.

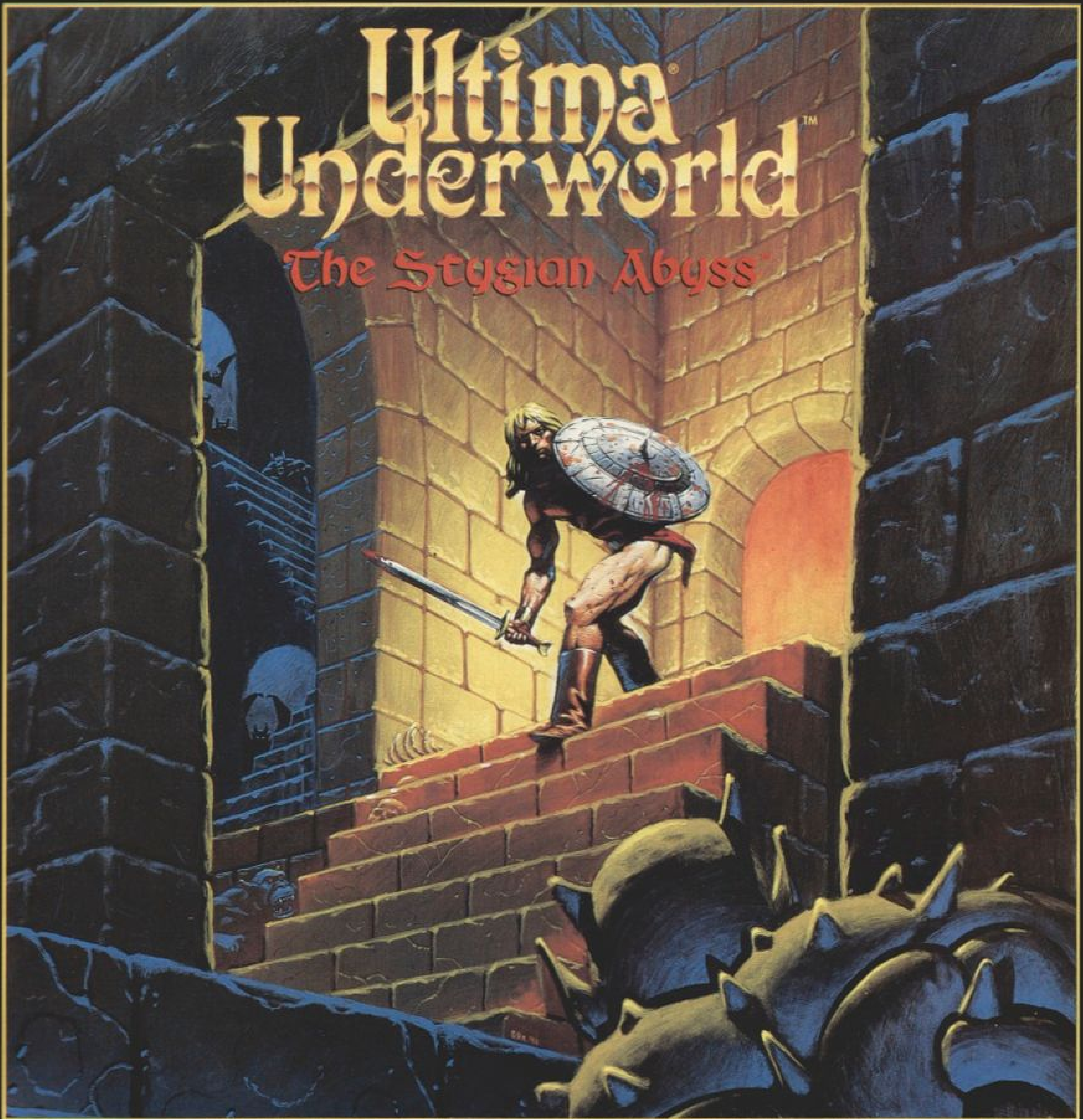
PURITY OF NOISE

Everybody in the house can now produce some kickin' sounds thanks to the Music System from Atari. What's this all about, then? The company is again promoting the sound aspects of the ST to the general public.

According to Atari, anybody can produce a top ten dance track using the wealth of dedicated software and gadgets available from third-party developers.

"With the unbeatable combination of MIDI technology and a huge library of music software, it comes as no surprise that the ST is used by the world's leading musicians including Madonna and Peter Gabriel," goes the blurb.

If only it was that simple, eh?



The first continuous-movement, 3D-dungeon, action fantasy!

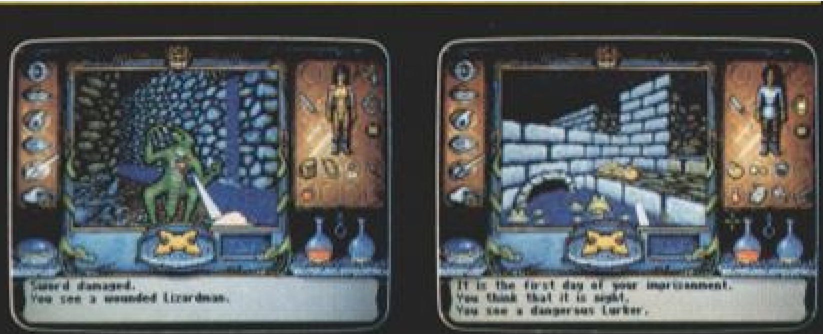
You never have to stop walking, running, jumping or fighting in this continuous-motion, virtual-reality epic!

Every wall, precipice, bridge, object and character in the dungeon is painstakingly modeled in 3D space!

Look down, straight ahead or up to find clues, solve puzzles, avoid traps, and battle fearsome monsters!

Some games must be played to be believed and Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss - a game of action, motion and movement - is one of them.

You won't believe your eyes



Sword damaged.
You see a wounded Lizardman.

It is the first day of your imprisonment.
You think that it is night.
You see a dangerous Lurker.

Actual screens may vary

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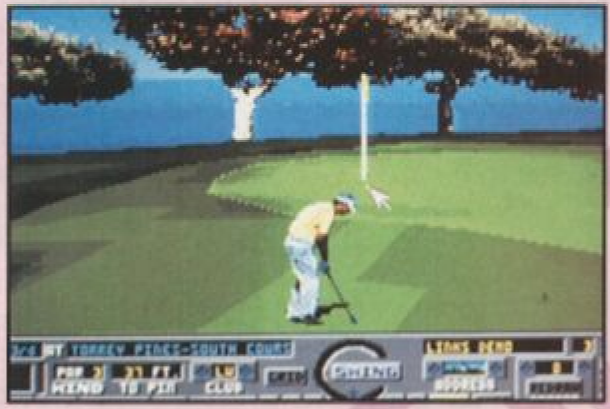
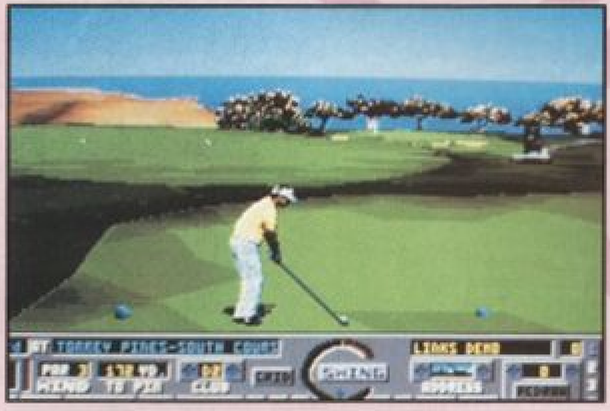
EAT YOUR GREENS

A special update on one of the few video game styles which appeals to both sexes. Here's a brief bit of info on the major golfing games coming soon for your machine...

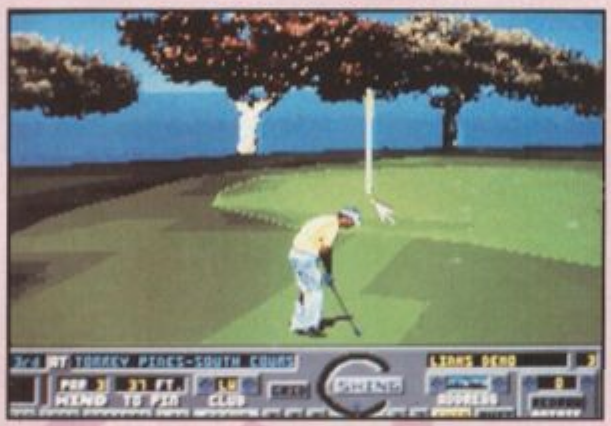


AMIGA

• They said it couldn't be done, according to US Gold, but the glorious 256-colour graphics in Links have been faithfully converted over from the original PC version. The designers of this impressive game took over 500 photographs of the course at Torrey Pines, USA. They also obtained some topographical drawings and detailed information on weather and wind conditions. All this was combined into 700K of realistic terrain data. Let's hope the Amiga conversion cuts out the long wait between each hole when this ocean of stats and facts is actually manipulated. Using a slow 8MHz PC, it used to take roughly 30 seconds to redraw the screen every time you wanted to take a shot!

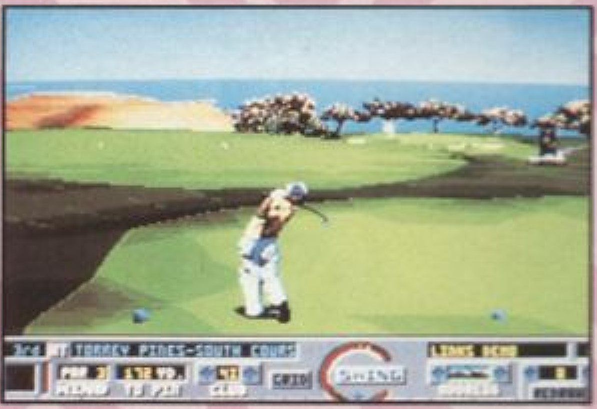


• Even CDTV owners can grab a slice of the sporty life with Jack Nicklaus CDTV by Accolade. The 18-hole course at Muirfield Village in North America has been painstakingly recreated using over 9,000 digitised stills. These photographs have been rendered as HAM screens and overlaid with 16-colour sprite animations of the golfers. "People should feel like they are playing golf with Jack Nicklaus himself," says Chris Bankston at Accolade, "We have a realistic view from nearly every spot on the course."



PC

• At the same time, Accolade is touting Jack Nicklaus' Golf and Course Design: Signature Edition as the first 256-colour VGA golf simulation and course designer. Apart from offering the normal features expected from such a prestigious license, the game contains plenty of nice touches like digitised trees, bitmapped bunkers and the 'natural' sampled sound of a golfball landing in the water hazard. "Signature Edition has better graphics, faster speed and more features than any other golf game," establishes a spokesperson, "It's beautiful, fun and challenging too. For the true golf aficionado, there really is no other choice."

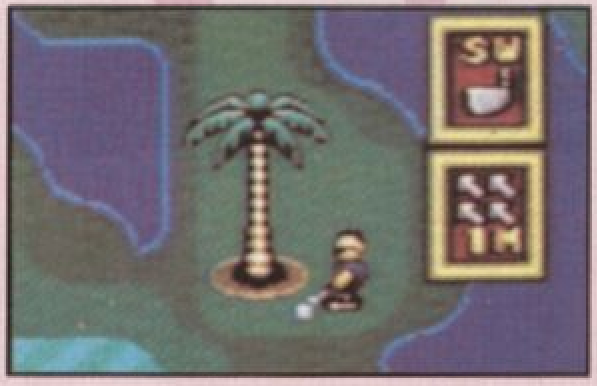


ST

• Sorry, there's no sign of any fresh golf crazy antics looming on the horizon.

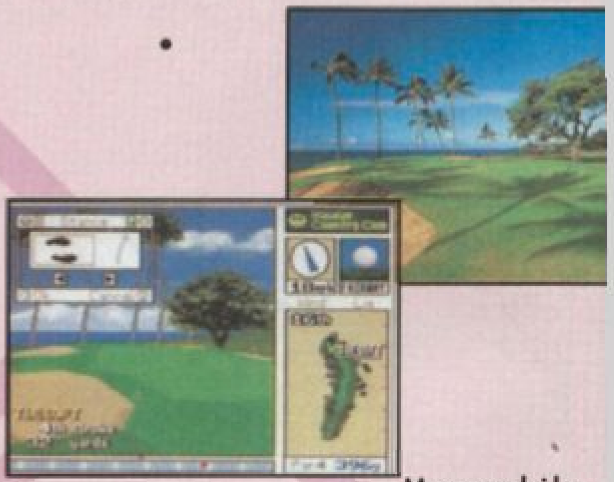
MEGADRIVE

• Veteran golfing simulation, Worldclass Leaderboard, is about to appear soon thanks to US Gold and Access.

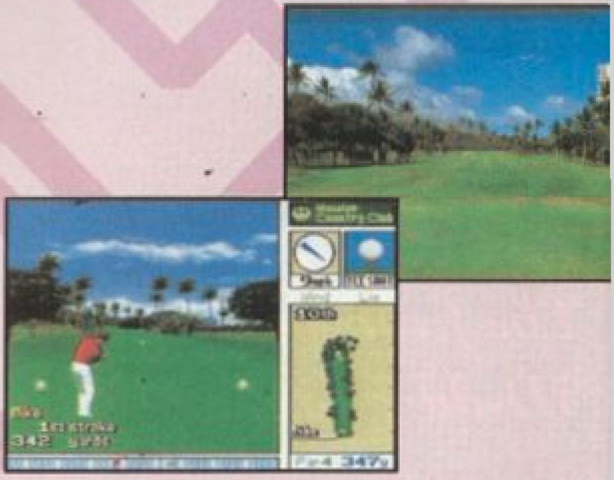


SUPER NES

• Skins is a blend of golf and simulated wagering on every hole. "There's no other game on the market that even comes close," assures Steve Blattspieler of Irem, "We predict Skins, thanks to the outstanding colour and detailed graphics, will be an instant hit with action players and golf lovers alike."



Meanwhile, True Golf Classics is finally making its way over from Japan via the USA. T&E Soft has intermixed digitised images with a custom 3D graphics system called Polysys. "It's topflight fun with superior gameplay," a spokesperson reckons, "No other golf game gives you this much. True Golf Classics takes you out to an actual PGA course in Hawaii, updates and your handicap after each tournament round and saves your stats and game using the built-in battery backup."



GAMEBOY

• From the firm that brought us Gradius and Operation C on the Gameboy, Ultra Golf offers a two-player option and a tournament match of 'pro-style' golf. Before each shot, players can adjust their stance, view the entire hole and get a suggestion of the best club to use from the caddie. Now available on import.

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It imprisons their bodies.
It even absorbs the building!
It's..

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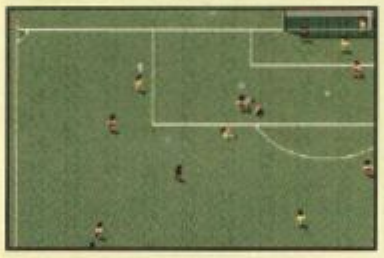
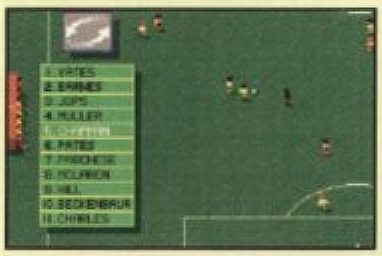
Gary Whitta's previews

Welcome one and welcome all, to the very last ACE Previews section. Yes, the powers that be have been trying to surpress my column (!) for months and they've finally succeeded - but fear not! We're not going down without a fight, and I've taken steps to ensure that we can send you off into the murky software future armed with a second-to-none idea of what lies ahead in the quality games stakes. So choke back those tears - they make the ink run - and be prepared to be fully clued-up about the finest software heading your way soon. Catch you later.

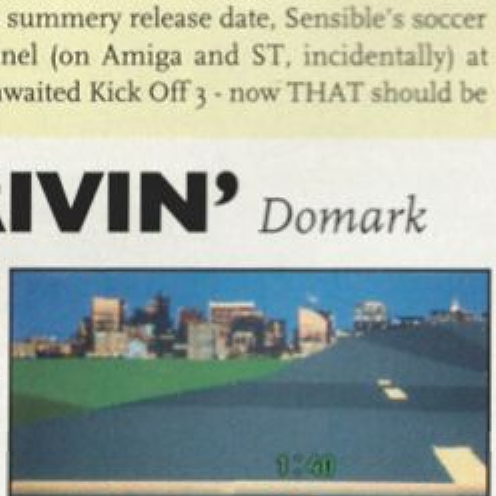
SENSIBLE SOCCER *Sensible Software*

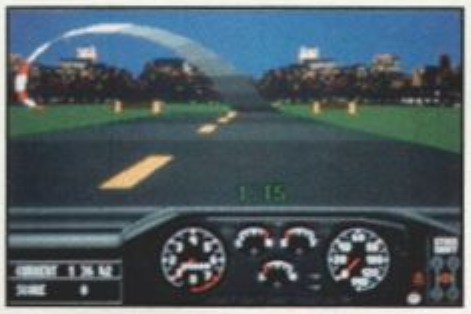




First revealed exclusively by my good self back in October, the latest opus from the creators of the awesome Mega lo Mania is at last nearing completion - and what a stonker it's turning out to be! A no-nonsense arcade footy simulation in the Kick Off vein, it's already being tipped as the game to knock Anco's classic off its throne. Sensible Soccer has a strong European theme - its release has been set to coincide with the Euro-championships in June, with the game featuring 64 real European club sides (including the likes of Inter Milan, Juventus and four English teams) and 40 European national teams. Players can compete in the European, UEFA and Cupwinners' Cups as well as creating their own league and cup competitions. Designer Jon Hare is making big claims about the game's innovative control, saying it plays "like Kick Off should play", and there's no end to the extra touches, like real player names, redefinable kits and a full tactical element. A publisher is currently in the process of signing the transfer papers, and we'll let you know who's got hold of it as soon as the ink is dry. It's interesting to note that with its summery release date, Sensible's soccer should be coming out of the tunnel (on Amiga and ST, incidentally) at around the same time as the long-awaited Kick Off 3 - now THAT should be

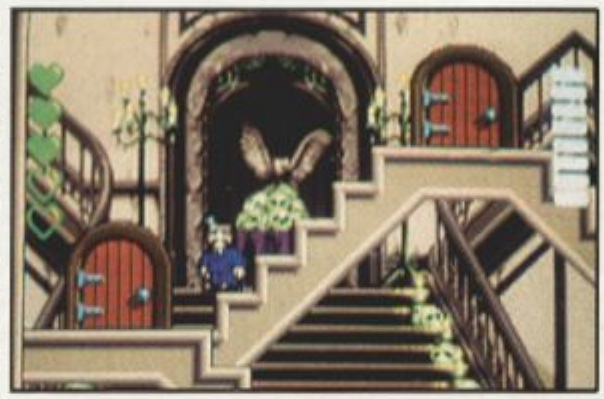
RACE DRIVIN' *Domark*



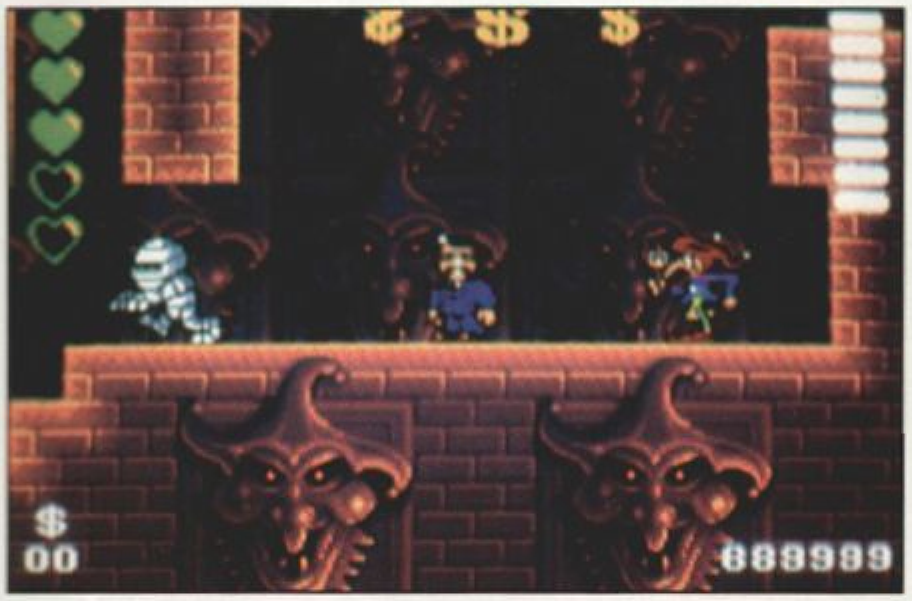


Atari's sequel to its hugely-successful (and technically ground-breaking) coin-op Hard Drivin' may not have made quite as much of an impact as the original, but it was nevertheless a considerably more entertaining affair. Essentially the same game, but built around a faster and more action-orientated environment, Race Drivin's now nearing completion on the 16-bit formats courtesy of Domark, convertors of the original Hard Drivin'. As before, the action is considerably tougher than in most arcade race games, with the car handling with startling realism and making pile-ups a regular occurence for novice drivers. All of the original game's tracks and features are there, together with a host of new ones. There are two new tracks (Super Stunt, featuring a treacherous corkscrew loop, and the speed-orientated Auto Cross Track) with the player choosing from three cars - Speedster, Roadster and Sportster - each with different handling and characteristics. Perhaps the nicest new feature, though, is the two-player option, known as Buddy Race, which allows head-to-head racing via dual machines and a link-up lead, or a single machine mode that has one player driving against a computerised pace car that emulates the other player's best performance. Domark says that Race is "noticably faster than Hard Drivin'" - it certainly looks a lot better, and players will be able to judge for themselves next month when ST, Amiga and PC versions are released.

THE ADDAMS FAMILY *Ocean*



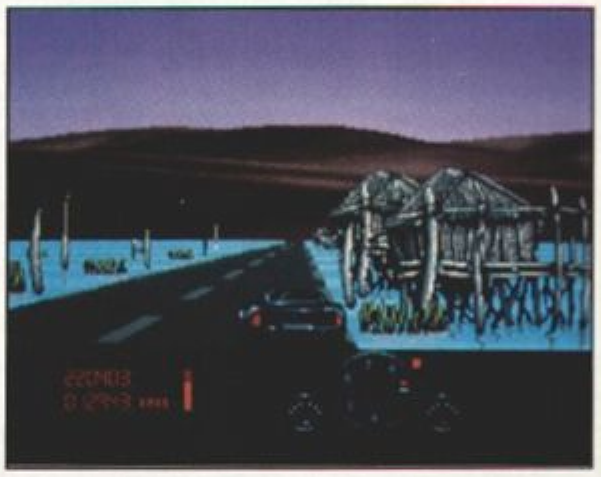
Just what is it about Ocean that makes them so uncannily good at acquiring licences? I mean let's face it, who would have thought that The Addams Family would have been anything like the monumental box office hit that it has been? But whatever the likelihood of its sucess may have been, there can be no doubt that it's top-notch material for computer conversion, what with all its inherent kookyness. That particular quality has certainly made it into the forthcoming 16-bit versions, in which the player steps into Raul Julia's shoes to play Gomez,



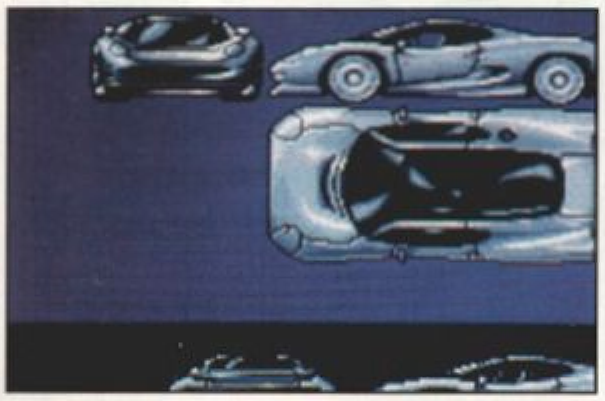
head of the Addamses. The story goes that Morticia, Wednesday, Pugsley, Uncle Fester and the rest of the happy clan have been kidnapped and it's up to good ol' Raul to get them back. This is the second time that Ocean's taken a big-name film and turned it into a jolly console-style platform escapade (Hudson Hawk being the first) - the action starts in the giant Addams household, where Gomez accesses a variety of bizarre worlds via a multitude of doors and stairways. Given the freaky subject matter, this cutesy-style interpretation should work even better than it did with Hudson Hawk. You'll get the chance to see for yourselves when Amiga and ST versions are released next month.

JAGUAR XJ220

Core Design



Just when you thought that there weren't any top racing car manufacturers left to licence, up pops Core Design with their contribution to the ever-growing, ever popular Lotus-style arcade speed'em-up genre. As the title of the game may suggest, it's based on Jaguar's latest £450,000 street speedster, which rolls off the production line in June. The game design's yet to be finalised, but at the moment it sees you at the wheel of the superfast XJ220 participating in a supercar derby, racing across 12 countries and over 30 tracks against other top makes of motor, including Porsche, Ferrari and Lambourghini. The Core boys have opted for a circuit system of racing, as they feel it works better than the stage system used by the current pack-leader, Lotus 2. All the usual features are in attendance, including high-speed pit stops and a full tournament mode, and the nice people at Jaguar are said to be most pleased with what they've seen of the game so far, so that can't be half bad. But of course the final judgement must rest with you, and you get to make that sometime over the next month or so when Jaguar XJ220 is released. Incidentally, Core is also planning a second Jaguar game using vector graphics and based on the successful Le Mans 24-hour team for release later in the year. Coo...



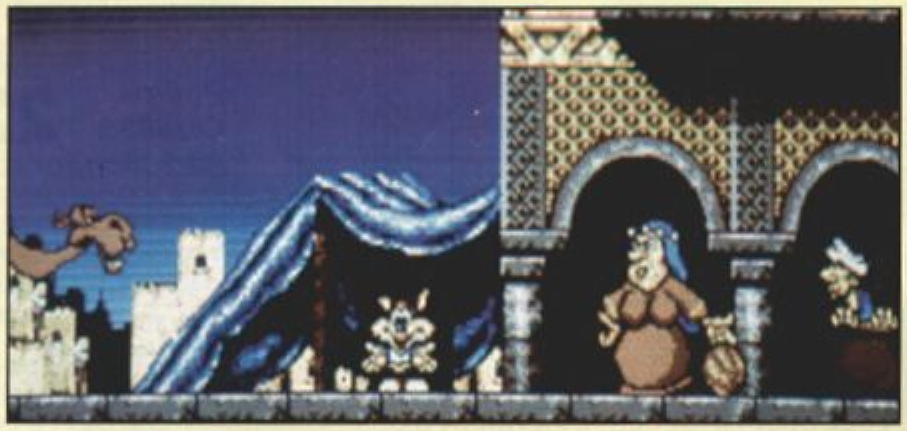
Project - X

Team 17

Who would have thought that a bunch of ex demo-writers could come up with such a smashing debut game as Alien Breed (reviewed ACE Issue 50)? No-one, that's who. But now that they've managed to stun us with the excellence of their futuristic arcade blast'em-up, they're preparing to do it again with... another futuristic arcade blast'em-up. It's not exactly the most original game idea in the world, but hey, who cares when it's as fast, smooth and lovely as this is looking? Prject is, as you've probably already guessed, a high-speed horizontal shooting extravaganza in the Silkworm mould, with the player rucking his way through the evil planet Ryxx in order to fight off an alien invasion. There are six fast'n'furious stages, starting off in deep space and later progressing to planet surfaces and into the heart of the alien's secret space station... all in super-colourful graphics and zippy animation. There's plenty of impressive stuff here, including a supersonic bonus section where the player pilots his craft through a narrow cavern at breakneck speed. Unfortunately, there's a price for all this technical excellence, as only owners of 1Mb Amigas will get a look-in. But Project-X isn't out until next month, so there's plenty of time for you to pick a memory upgrade from some tinky computer show. This may be the best reason in ages to splash out on one.

TITUS THE FOX *Palace*

When Sonic the Hedgehog first burst onto the games scene on a bright Autumn's day last year, it immediately became inevitable that the cute character-based platform game would, before too long, make a comeback. This latest jem to make the leap across the channel (or maybe through the tunnel now that it's finished, eh?) might, by people of a more cynical persuasion, be misconstrued as a rather blatant Sonic the rip-off. Actually, the name may be sort of similar, but apart from that and the presence of platforms there's very little to compare the two games by. Titus is, in fact, very similar to the French firm's earlier (and very nice) platform effort The Blues Brothers. The story goes that lovable Fox Titus has had his girlfriend kidnapped and whisked off to Marrakesh, leaving the heroic mammal with no choice but to venture all the way across the world to rescue her. What follows is a multi-national levels'n'ladders romp with super-cute graphics, bouncy tunes and - hopefully - excellent console-style gameplay. Titus The Fox is out next month on ST and Amiga. Fantastic, Mr Fox!



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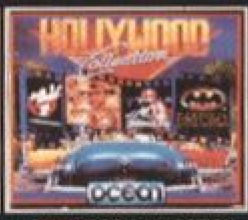
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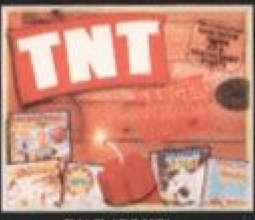
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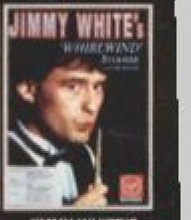
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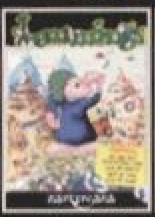
AMIGA 13.99
ST 13.99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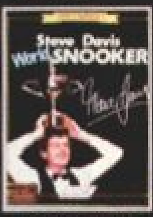
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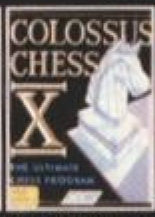
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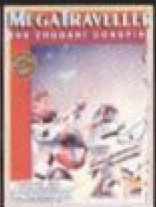
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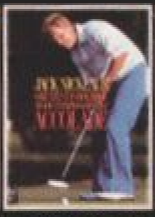
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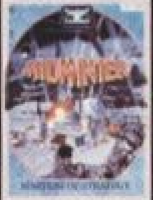
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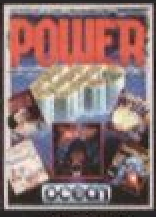
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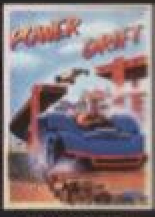
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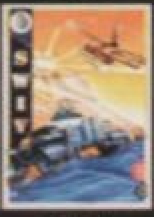
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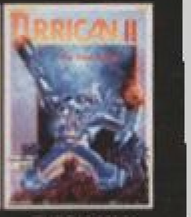
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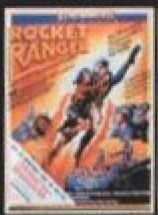
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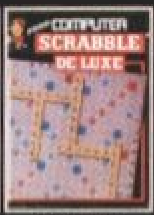
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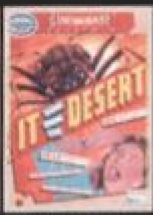
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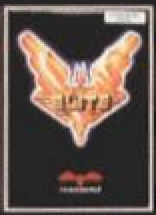
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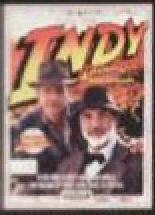
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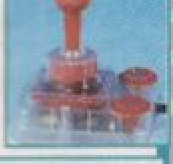
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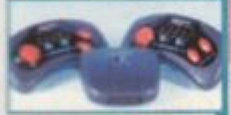
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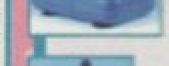
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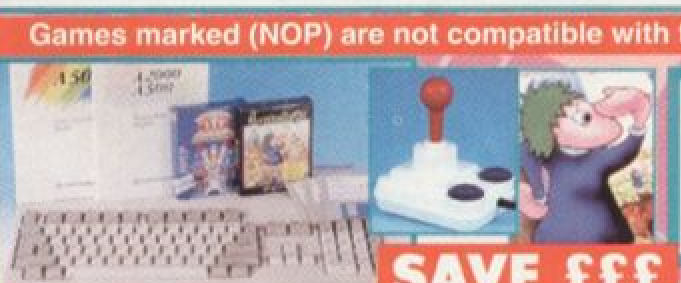

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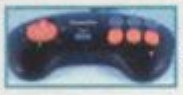

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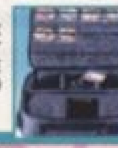

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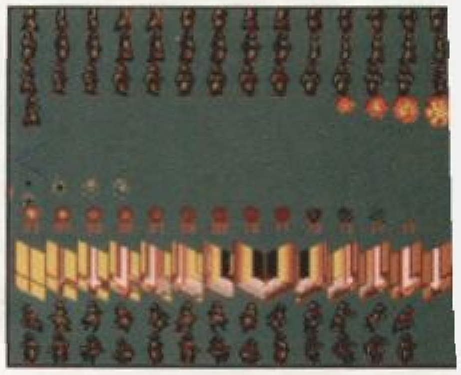
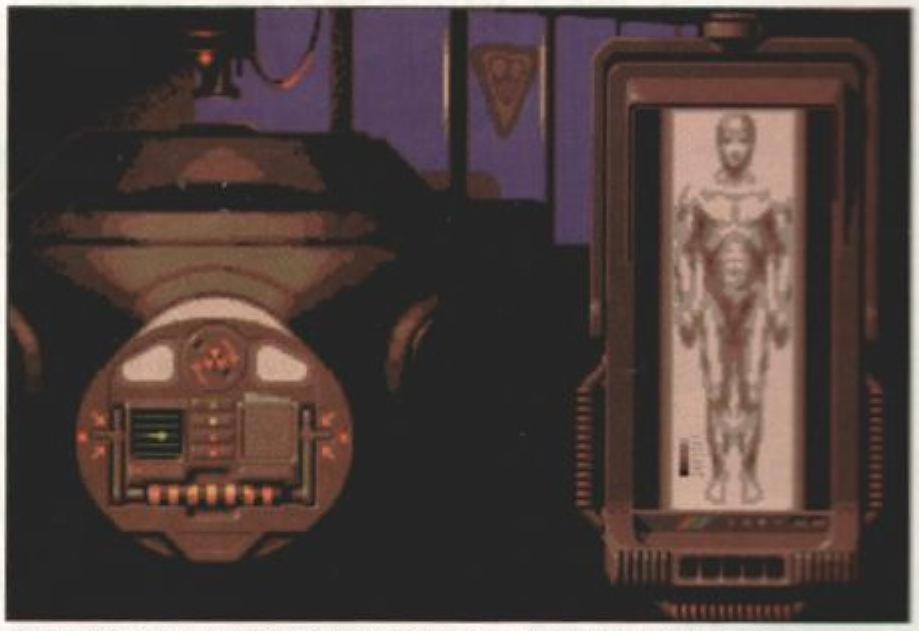
BOB



The award-winning boys behind Populous I and II and Powermonger regard their latest project, BOB, as their most ambitious undertaking to date. On the surface, it could also be misconstrued as the company's least interesting, too...

Putting it tenuously, BOB, like Michael Jackson who said he wasn't like other boys in Thriller, is not like other simulations. Oh sure, BOB doesn't look so strange in the pictures on these pages, but beneath the colourful gloss there's a decidedly grey matt undercoat...

The idea for BOB came to the team about two years ago - around the time that Flood was nearing completion. It was over a pizza, no less. The food wasn't influential, but it just goes to show how easily ideas can strike when you least expect them.



Troops are made and displayed inside the genetic engineering laboratory. It's worthwhile ensuring that the research and development department is more than adequately funded.

"The original idea was to control these little men with three bars _ intelligence, strength and perception. These chemicals were injected directly into their brains. They're essentially individuals but you influence their behaviour to differing degrees."

That's Pete Molyneux talking about BOB's conception. He's currently putting the finishing touches to the PC version of Populous II before he tackles the implementation of BOB's strategic element: the business algorithms.

Yes, the business algorithms, for BOB is, believe it or not, a simulation of sorts of the high-flying world of international finance... with a twist sharper than lemon in the form of arcade action aplenty. But how can these two seemingly disparate elements possibly be successfully married to produce the playability expected from Bullfrog?

The pepperoni-driven prototype plan eventually developed into a story, which goes like this... In the not-too-distant future, a company will pioneer the Neural Chip - a miracle of modern technology which is plugged in to the back of the user's neck to create the desired escapist illusion. There's no need to book a break in Barbados and blow a bundle on booze-and-birds binges when you can actually experience all those sensations and more, first hand, via a simple and inexpensive electronic device.

Look, it could happen. And if it did, then it wouldn't take long for other companies to jump on the bandwagon and produce their own Neural Chips, which is exactly what's happened in BOB.

Assuming the role of the big cheese of the company which discovered the Neural Chip, you desire the demise of your rivals. Industrial espionage and sabotage are the order of the day as you send genetically engineered agents to infiltrate and eradicate the opposition. There are other, less action-orientated means of expanding your empire, but whatever route you choose the goal is the same: global domination.

The bulk of BOB's programming is being handled by Sean Cooper, 29, who's shunned the prospect of a successful modeling career - following his Clothes Show debut in the Autumn of 1991 to pursue software stardom.

BOB is only a working title, currently favoured by Bullfrog over CyberAssault and Higher Functions. The acronym for Blue and Orange Bloke arose in the very early stages of development when Sean was putting together scratch screens - visual test-beds to give a feel for the product. The name is unlikely to change until BOB nears completion in September.

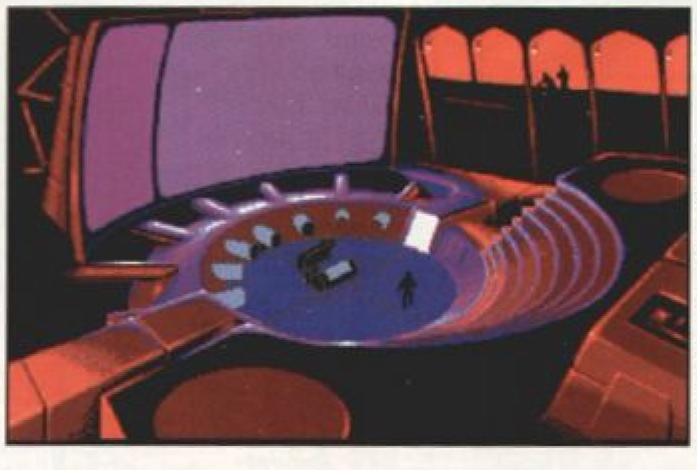
Bounding back to BOB's humble beginnings we find that the product has been through many changes. Sean's early efforts amounted to little more than a large scrolling picture, too flat to function as an interactive environment.

"It had to be made three dimensional," says Molyneux, "but we didn't want to use vectors (it would take too long) so we kept the isometric viewpoint. We did consider using an oblique perspective, but it proved impractical so we dropped it."

With a basic look established, Sean spent the following few months resolving the technical difficulties of a three dimensional isometric environment, such as creating the illusion that objects are moving in front of and behind the scenery.

"It eventually reached the stage where it was flexible enough to implement the original idea," Molyneux reveals, "so we produced an editor program to allow us to create maps. That was enormously difficult, but we did it and now the original idea is being developed to produce playability.

"You start in your office with a map of the world showing all the major companies. They all start small, and their growth is related



(Left) Welcome to the office. Have a nice day!

(Right) One of the earliest incarnations of BOB utilised this slightly different display... an oblique perspective view. The 'clean' lines of the more extreme 45 degree angles make for an attractive but sadly impractical viewpoint.

to the way you play. We're aiming to fit in around a hundred countries with all the major cities - hopefully around two to three hundred. Each city's around four times the size of a Populous map."

The cities also have fully-functioning lifestyles. They have their own populations, buildings and factories, and traffic systems, with cars, trucks, trains and monorails. They even have timely rush hours!

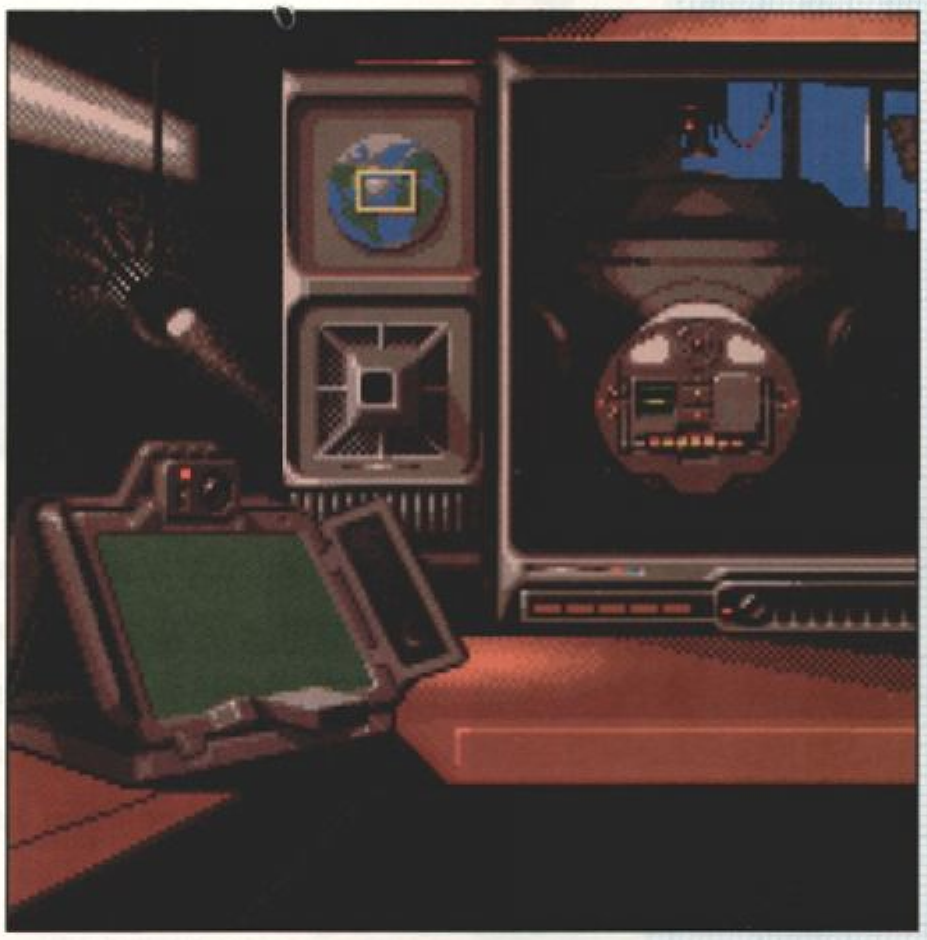
"From your office you can buy and sell stocks and shares to affect the other companies," Molyneux continues. "You can hire and fire people or pump money into research and development for Neural Chips or new genetically engineered troops. You can even watch television. Viewing the adverts essentially allows you to find out what your rivals are up to. We're trying to fit in as many adverts as possible. We're hoping for about twenty minutes' worth."

However, the most interesting option open to you in your office is definitely the one which allows you to view the three dimensional outside world and determine the actions of your troops.

"Three bars are the key to the whole thing, says Molyneux. "We're very proud of the way they work."

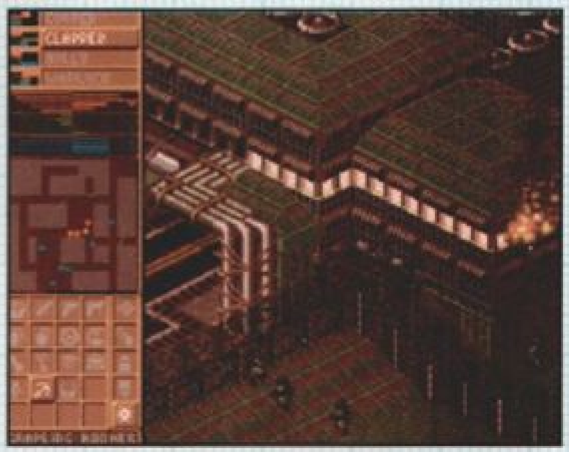
They work like this: by adjusting a troop's levels of intelligence, adrenalin and perception, subtle behavioral differences are created. Using the many possible combinations of these three bars in conjunction with a handful of basic icons, such as 'GOTO' and 'USE', the troops can be ordered to perform dozens of different functions.

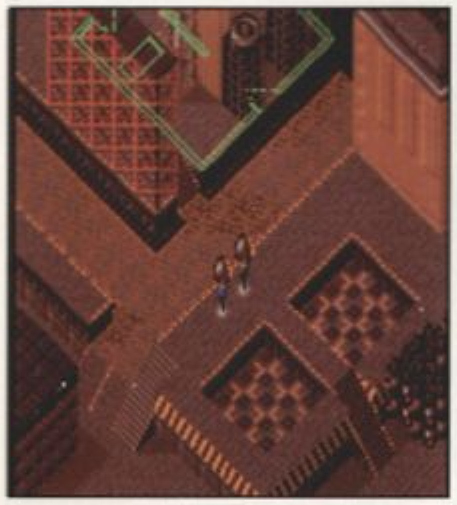
For example, a gun-wielding troop with a high level of adrenalin would be too excitable to be trusted to aim accurately, but he would make an excellent aggressive combatant. Sadly, there's another, more devastating side-effect relating to over-use of the three chemicals... the doped-up troop's personality will eventually become its own and it won't be so easy to direct it.



Your business is run from this desk. Daily dealings include buying and selling shares via the television screens to the left of the picture and visiting the large area in the centre of the shot: the genetic engineering laboratory.

A closer look at BOB's control panel reveals the three all-important bars at the top and the bank of icons used to influence the troops' behaviour at the bottom. The multi-functional display in the centre section of the panel is in this instance occupied by a small map of the troops' surroundings.



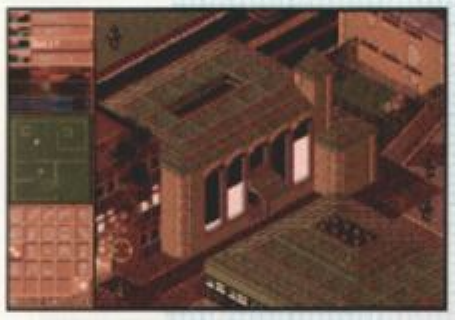


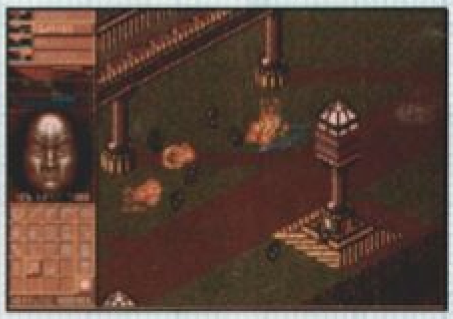
The troops' primary objective is to visit cities and create new businesses. They set up offices and manufacturing plants and the like around the world, indulging in the occasional spot of sabotage, hijacking and kidnapping and much more besides.

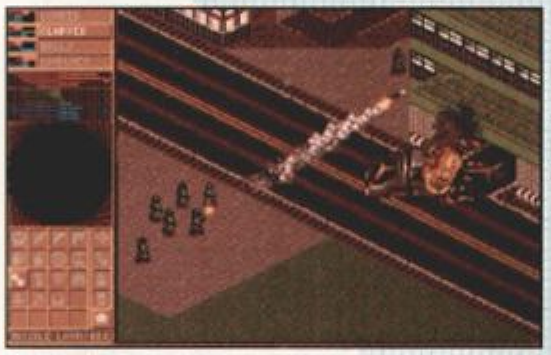
"You could blow up your rival's research and development plants or just steal their secrets," says Molyneux. "Or you could even stir up dirt to swing people's opinion against the company."

You see, to make the process of ruling the world a little easier, the Neural Chips produced by your company contain some secret additional programming which can easily be triggered to activate a sequence to control the users. Subtly, so your customers' become slaves to your rhythm.

Incorporating into BOB such a high level of detail is not without its problems. There are so many possible visual outcomes to situations that a compromise has had to be reached regarding context-sensitive detail. For example, blowing up a section of monorail could cause the train to crash to the ground. The lack of memory for appropriate frames of animation means that it wouldn't look pretty but at least you'd get the idea.







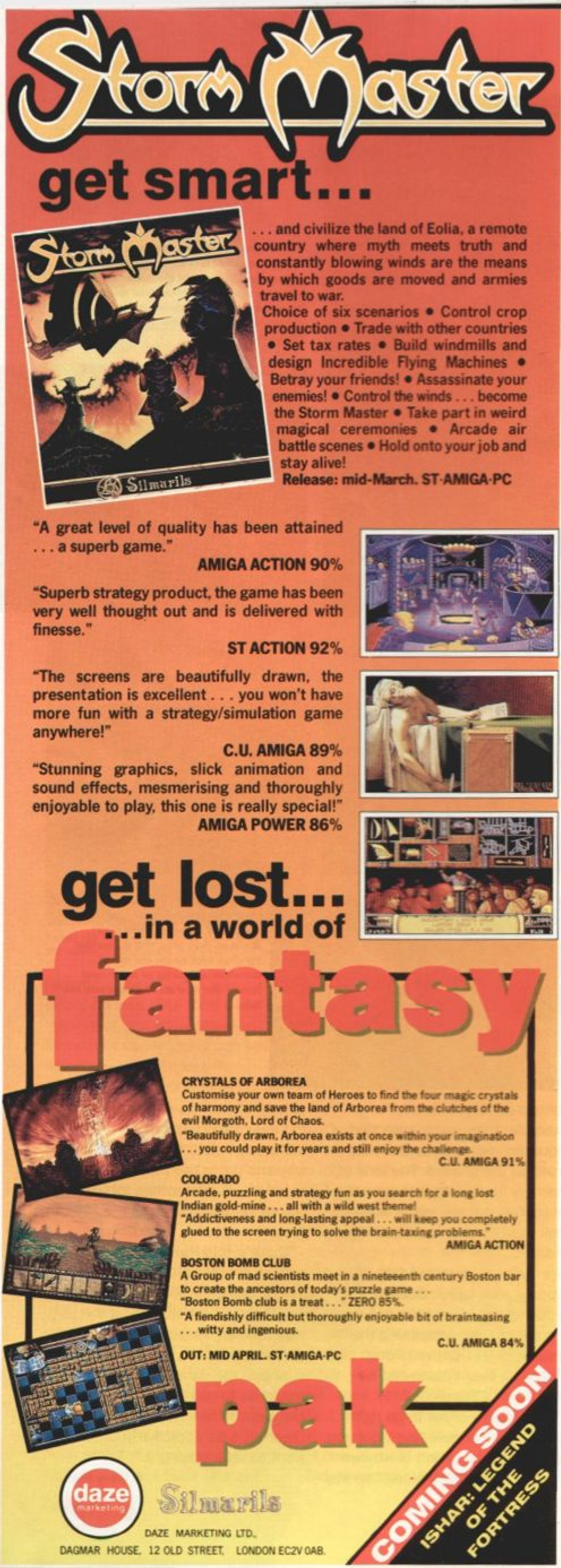
These three shots show BOB in action. Explosions abound as the genetically-engineered troops go about their business, destroying rival companies' buildings with bombs and rocket launchers and taking on lethal laser turrets. But BOB didn't always look like this...

As the order seems to be growing ever taller, Bullfrog's reducing the size of the universe it produces but increasing the level of detail. But will Peter Molyneux ever finish what he started with Populous?

"Ultimately I'd like to go right down to the people level, but you can go too far, which is why we involve play-testers along the way to help shape the playability. It's too easy to forget that there's too much detail. It can get in the way and prove too much to handle until it becomes totally pointless, which is what the testers notice.

"There's this Russian fish simulator program I remember seeing, which creates any fish you like, and it behaves as if it was real. We're aiming for a simulation as complete as that. I suppose the ultimate objective would be to produce something like Better Than Life in Red Dwarf. It's so addictive you don't want to stop playing it."

● **Gary Penn**



get smart...

... and civilize the land of Eolia, a remote country where myth meets truth and constantly blowing winds are the means by which goods are moved and armies travel to war.

Choice of six scenarios • Control crop production • Trade with other countries • Set tax rates • Build windmills and design Incredible Flying Machines • Betray your friends! • Assassinate your enemies! • Control the winds ... become the Storm Master • Take part in weird magical ceremonies • Arcade air battle scenes • Hold onto your job and stay alive!

Release: mid-March. ST·AMIGA·PC

"A great level of quality has been attained ... a superb game."

AMIGA ACTION 90%

"Superb strategy product, the game has been very well thought out and is delivered with finesse."

ST ACTION 92%

"The screens are beautifully drawn, the presentation is excellent ... you won't have more fun with a strategy/simulation game anywhere!"

C.U. AMIGA 89%

"Stunning graphics, slick animation and sound effects, mesmerising and thoroughly enjoyable to play, this one is really special!"

AMIGA POWER 86%

get lost...

...in a world of fantasy

CRYSTALS OF ARBOREA

Customise your own team of Heroes to find the four magic crystals of harmony and save the land of Arborea from the clutches of the evil Morgoth, Lord of Chaos.

"Beautifully drawn, Arborea exists at once within your imagination ... you could play it for years and still enjoy the challenge.

C.U. AMIGA 91%

COLORADO

Arcade, puzzling and strategy fun as you search for a long lost Indian gold-mine ... all with a wild west theme!

"Addictiveness and long-lasting appeal ... will keep you completely glued to the screen trying to solve the brain-taxing problems."

AMIGA ACTION

BOSTON BOMB CLUB

A Group of mad scientists meet in a nineteeenth century Boston bar to create the ancestors of today's puzzle game ...

"Boston Bomb club is a treat ..." ZERO 85%.

"A fiendishly difficult but thoroughly enjoyable bit of brainteasing ... witty and ingenious.

C.U. AMIGA 84%

OUT: MID APRIL. ST·AMIGA·PC

pak

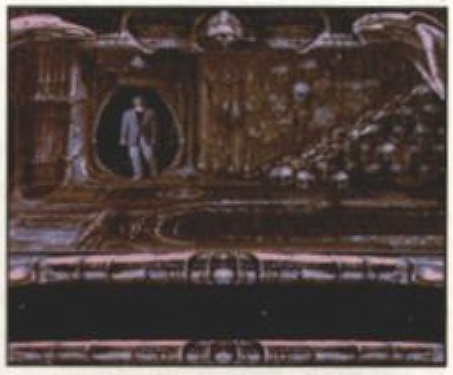
COMING SOON ISHAR: LEGEND OF THE FORTRESS

DAZE MARKETING LTD.,
DAGMAR HOUSE, 12 OLD STREET, LONDON EC2V 0AB.

ADD

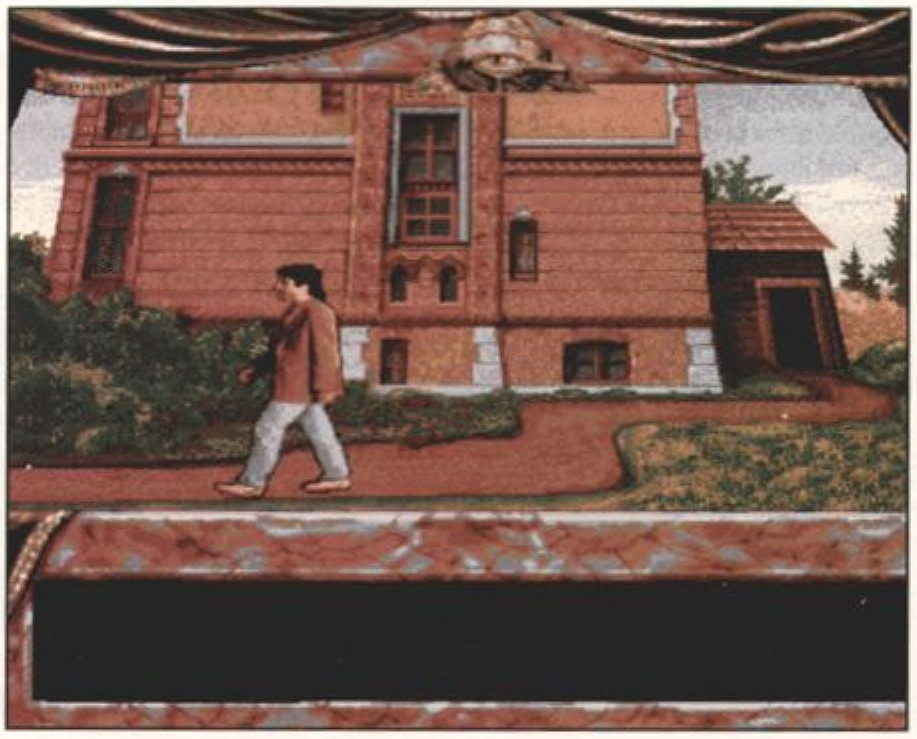
Dark Seed, the first game from newly formed Stateside company Cyberdreams, boasts graphics by H.R. 'Alien' Giger and some top-notch programming talent. So why does it remind Steve Cooke of Legend's 1983 release Valhalla? And is that such a bad thing..?

Professional scriptwriters are wont to claim that there are only 36 basic plots, that these essential stories have always existed and that they will endure, unchanged in number or nature, until the end of time. Silence of the Lambs, The Canterbury Tales, Jurassic Park - whatever potboiler you care to name, Mr and Mrs Neanderthal were sucking it up thousands of years ago. And in 200000AD, Barbara Cartland CCCCVIth will still be making money out of it. The pot may change, but the pudding goes on forever...



People, however, have been telling stories since God first entered Adam and Eve's address in his FiloFax. They've had time - a lot of it - to establish the rules of genre, setting and style. They have, however, only been playing computer games for about 30 years and the stylistic wheels, so to speak, are still in the process of being invented.

As with wheels, the genres that survive are the ones that work. We've had a few square

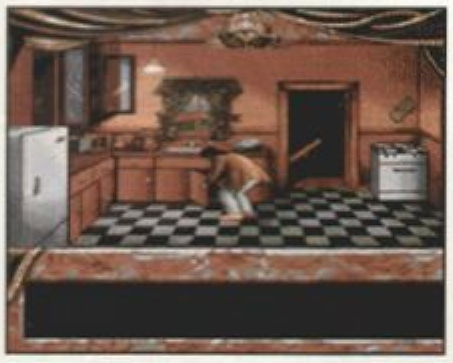


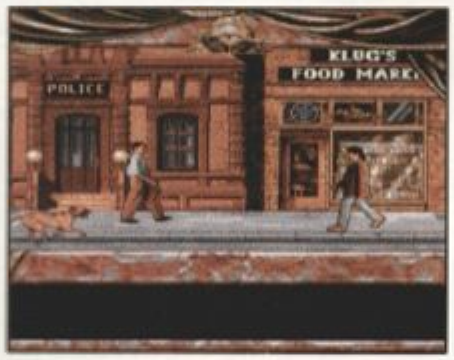
ONE ALIEN...

ones over the last few years: for example, the text adventure, whatever Anita 'Magnetic Scrolls' Sinclair may say, is dead. Text is not an ideal medium for use with a VDU, especially when you've got colour, sound and, even better now we have CD, digitised speech to play with. And whatever happened to the scrolling comic book format of Redhawk? And who cares?

Other square wheels have effectively disappeared as they were rounded up by better implementation. Single-screen scenarios like Kong and PacMan have succumbed to multi-dimensional scrolling; the top-down view is increasingly vulnerable to the ever-improving isometric approach; shoot-em-ups have acquired resource management and role-playing characteristics and so on...

One format, however, has remained pretty well static since 1983, and that's the animated graphic adventure. Just take a look at the shot on this page from Legend's Valhalla and ask yourself what exactly you get in Kings Quest V that you didn't get with Thor and his pals back in 1983.





OK, sound. Valhalla just beeped. But it did beep - and that was all the Spectrum could do. The addition of quality sound is simply an improvement in execution, made easier by a more powerful 16-bit platform.

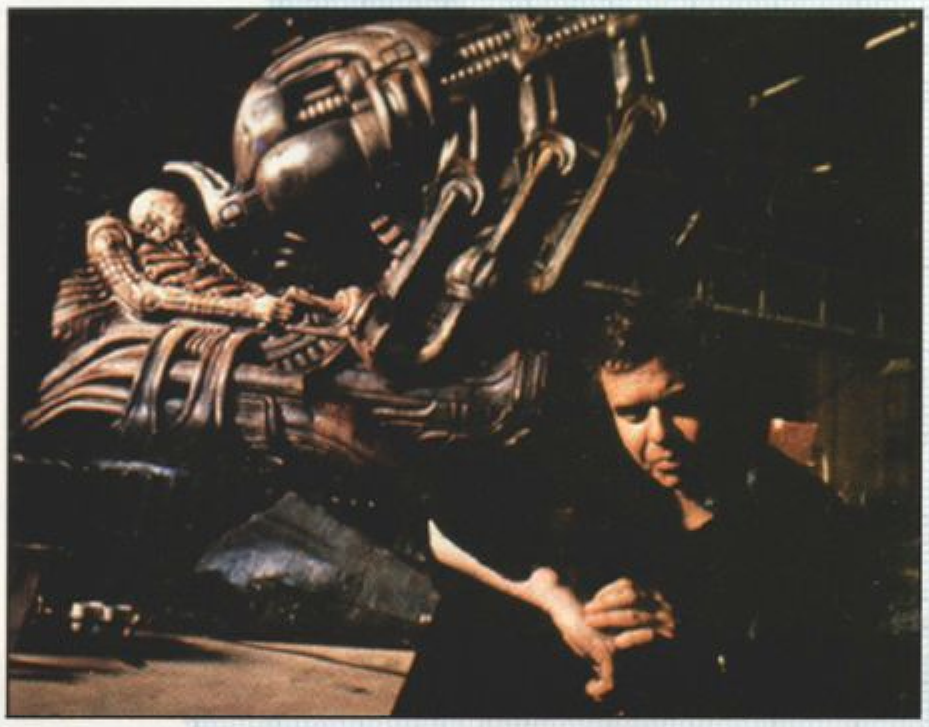
OK, better graphics. True, up to a point. The latter day animated adventures have learnt a few lessons about perspective viewpoints. But most of what you see is simply more colour and better quality artwork. Again, this is an improvement in execution, not a development of the essential idea.

Bigger maps - yes, but it's still the same idea. Simpler interfaces, ditto. Faster and better animation, ditto...

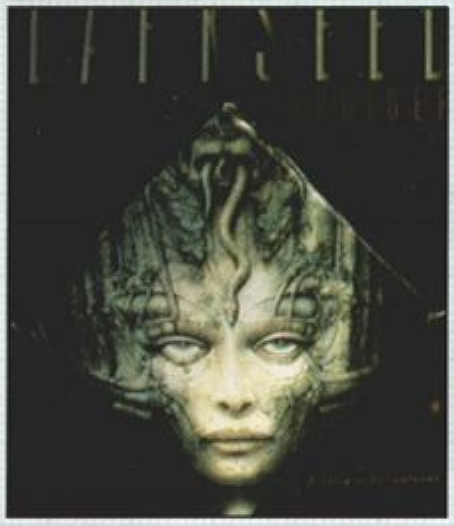
If the computer gaming world is going to end up with 36 basic genres of its own, it's beginning to look as if the animated adventure is one of them. And Cyberdream's first release, which - don't get me wrong - is a great game, just proves the point. The pot is fancy stuff, but the puddin's good ol'fashioned roly-poly, with a few tasty additions.

Add One Alien

The first element that Cyberdreams have added to the recipe is emotive power. Take Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger, who created Alien and lives near Zurich with a pet Siamese cat Muggi and some of the most disturbing household furniture you're ever likely to see. Use 640*350 hi-res VGA graphics with 16 colours, switching palettes for different locations to avoid monotony. Use digitisers and five artists over a period of one year to generate 8 megs of graphics data that make excellent use of Giger's visions of 'fear, guilt and anxiety'. Add digitised speech and a great Ad Lib sound track.



Giger on the set of Alien (1979) at Pinewood Studios (© 20th Century Fox)

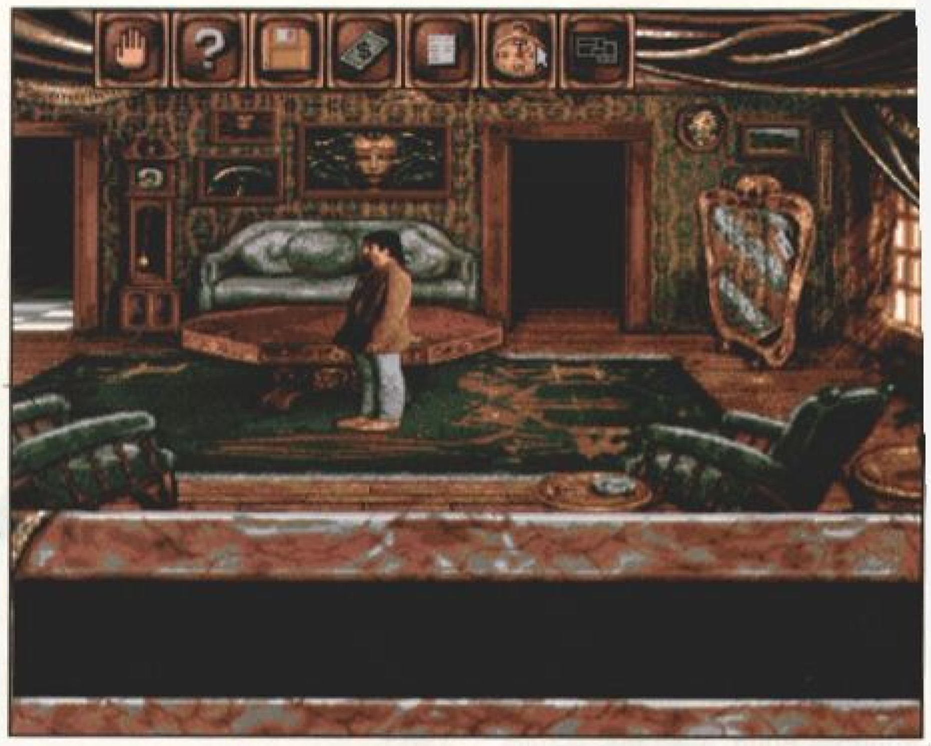


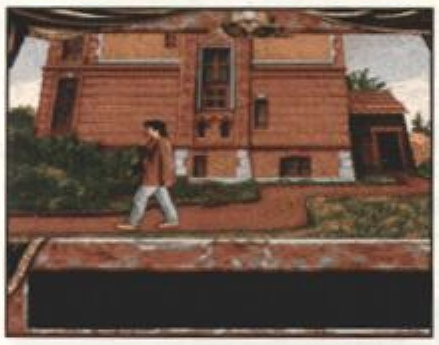
Mix all this together and you have Valhalla with some pretty awesome knobs on. People giggled when Thor beat the shit out of Loki, but no-one's laughing when Dark Seed hero Michael Dawson gets a headache from hell. What's going on?

The story (it's probably number 27 of the 36 all-timers, but it may be 28...) involves Michael in a spot of bother with an alien race who are bent on world domination (definitely number 28). Dawson's just moved into a new house and it seems to be giving him a few headaches. Aspirin doesn't help, which isn't too much of a surprise because the poor chap's got an alien in his bonce. Possibly (let's not give too much away here) this alien has something to do with those rather weird nightmares he's been having. Surely not, nurse.

This story is initially presented in traditional animated adventure form. However, the graphics are superlative - as you can see on these pages. Cyberdream's decision to stick with the limited palette and greater resolution has really paid off and the level of domestic detail on these screens really adds to the atmosphere.

OK, don't forget that this is still roly-poly, but it's very good roly-poly. Take the animated figure, for example. We've seen several major advances in this field since the Valhalla days. Colour, of

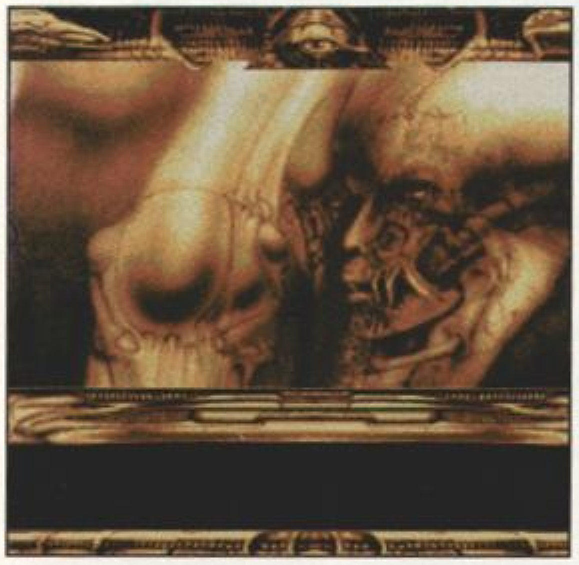




course. Larger, more detailed sprites, as in King's Quest IV. Then, in Brian Moriarty's Loom, experimentation with 'camera angles' and scaling (see panel elsewhere). Cyberdreams, however, have taken the next logical step and digitised the central character. Crucially, they've also added dynamic rescaling, with enough steps to ensure that the process is totally smooth. Walk Dawson 'up-stage' as it were and he may shrink in stature but he grows in realism. Very good roly-poly.

> ***"The PC is now the machine of choice for adults. We can do more with it, even if sprites would come in rather handy!"***

Rescaling makes such a difference because it doesn't just affect the way the character moves, it also gives the graphic designers much greater freedom in the way they 'set up camera angles' within the game. A figure that can immediately shrink or expand as it moves can be caught in close up, medium shot, or long shot without worrying about subsequent movement in the frame. As any film director will tell you, camera angles make all the difference in any movie, but particularly in suspense - and if ever a game had suspenders, this is it.



Discrete Horror of the Bourgeoisie

If you're used, for example, to Roberta Williams' storylines for the King's Quest series, you'll be expecting to see flowers, fairies and pretty birdies round every corner. Not here, you won't. In Dark Seed you get toilets, pot plants and cast-iron bathtubs, in great detail. Without any disrespect to Roberta, who's games I adore, this is the Real World, not Candy Mountain - and a heavy dose of reality, of course, is what makes fantasy work best. 'We looked at the Sierra games,' commented boss Pat Ketchum, 'and thought it would be nice if we could do something that wasn't a fairy tale.' They've certainly succeeded.

There's more to the scenery than meticulous detail and technical competence, however. As you explore the game, you'll discover that beneath (or beyond) this bourgeois hi-res des res is a Gigeresque dimension of horror which, sooner or later, you will have to enter. In one of the game's many subtle hints, you do so through a mirror in one of the rooms - and you will later discover that the underworld is literally a mirror image of the overworld. This leads to some interesting gameplay features as you find that routes which lead from A to B upstairs lead to A' to B' downstairs. The designers have worked in some neat twists based on this simple but attractive idea.

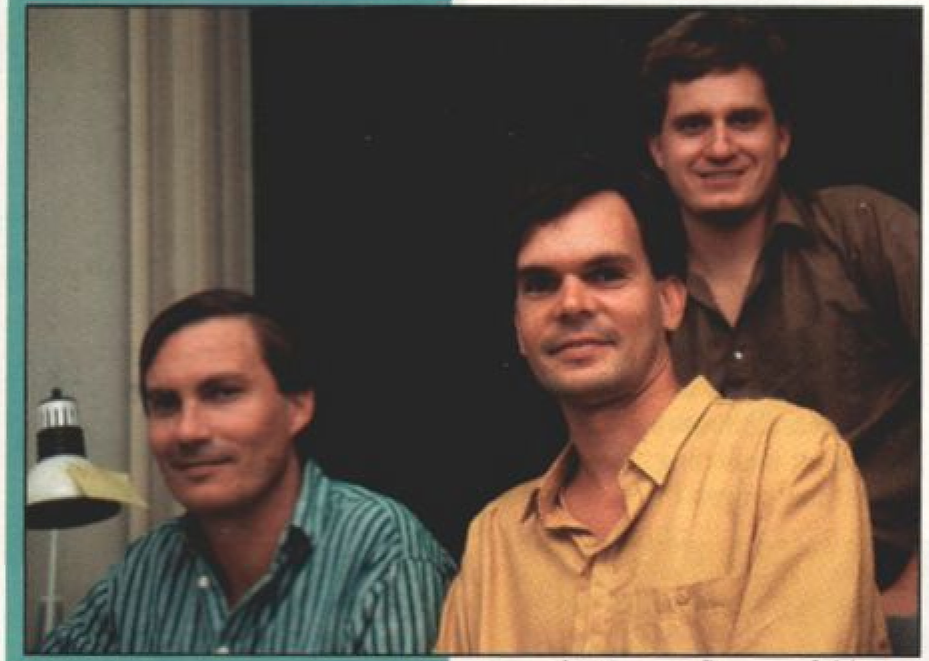
Controlling the Dawson figure is extremely easy. No typing is required and the mouse icon switches between three modes depending on what you want to do. As with some other recent releases, the icon changes as you move it over significant objects to indicate a possible action or message - this saves a lot of time endlessly clicking on different parts of the carpet looking for, for example, trapdoors and the like.

Knowledge acquired by the character has to be completely reacquired each time you play again from the beginning. In other

TEAM MACHINE

Cyberdreams is a pretty impressive set-up. Co-founder Pat Ketchum was one of the motivating forces behind Sullivan-Bluth Interactive Media, responsible for Space Ace and Dragon's Lair; before that he founded Datasoft where he launched games as diverse and impressive as Zaxxon and Pole Position. Producer Harald Seeley's background includes a spell at Taito and previous credits cover games ranging from Rocket Ranger to Indiana Jones on the NES. John Krause was previously at The Software Toolworks, where his projects included the Miracle Piano teaching system.

But it's not just the technical guys who are top-hole. Apart from working with Giger, Cyberdreams also have projects going with Syd 'Blade Runner' Mead and John 'Predator' Rosengrant. We can't wait!



(Bottom, clockwise from top left) Pat Ketchum, Joby-Rome Otero, Harald Seeley, John Krause, Gary Vick, Paul Drzewiecki, and Julia Ulano. The Dark Seed project kept five graphic artists, two programmers, a music programmer, musician, game designer and screenwriter busy for twelve months. All you'll need is a 286 PC at 12Mhz or above...

(Below, left to right) Producer Harald Seeley with colleagues John Krause and Gary Vick.

TAKE YOUR SENSES TO THE EDGE...
... AND BEYOND!
SPACE CRUSADE
Screen shots from Amiga format
GREMLIN

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Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.,
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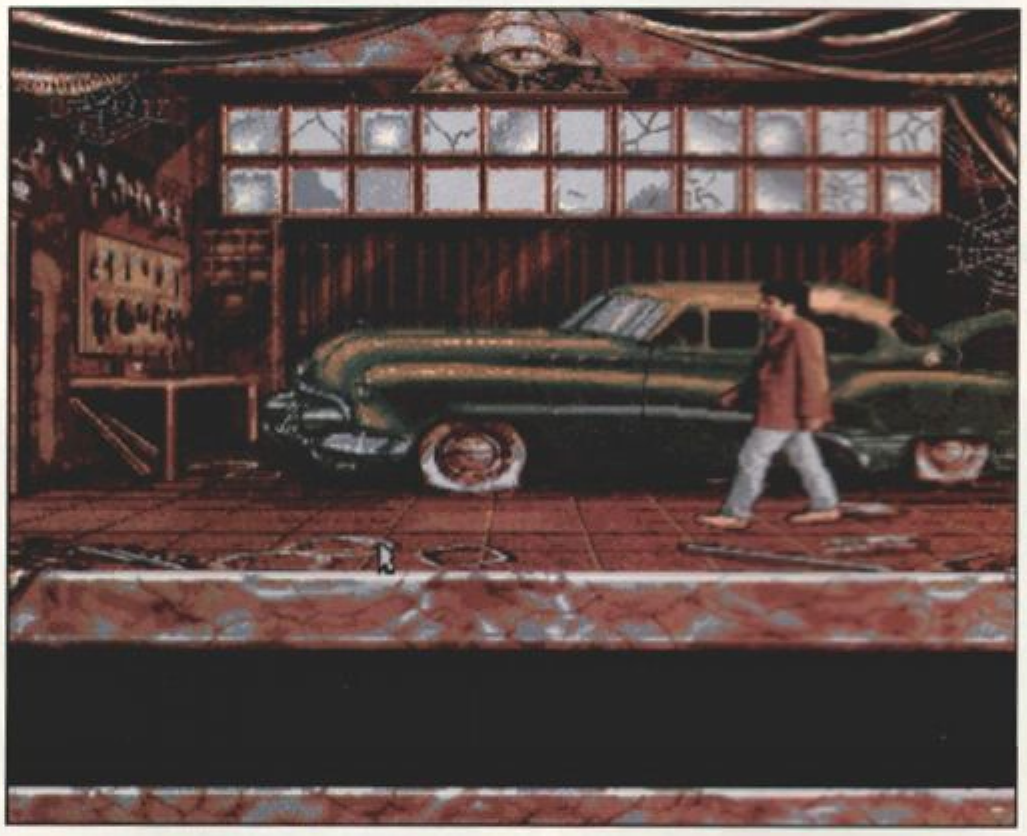
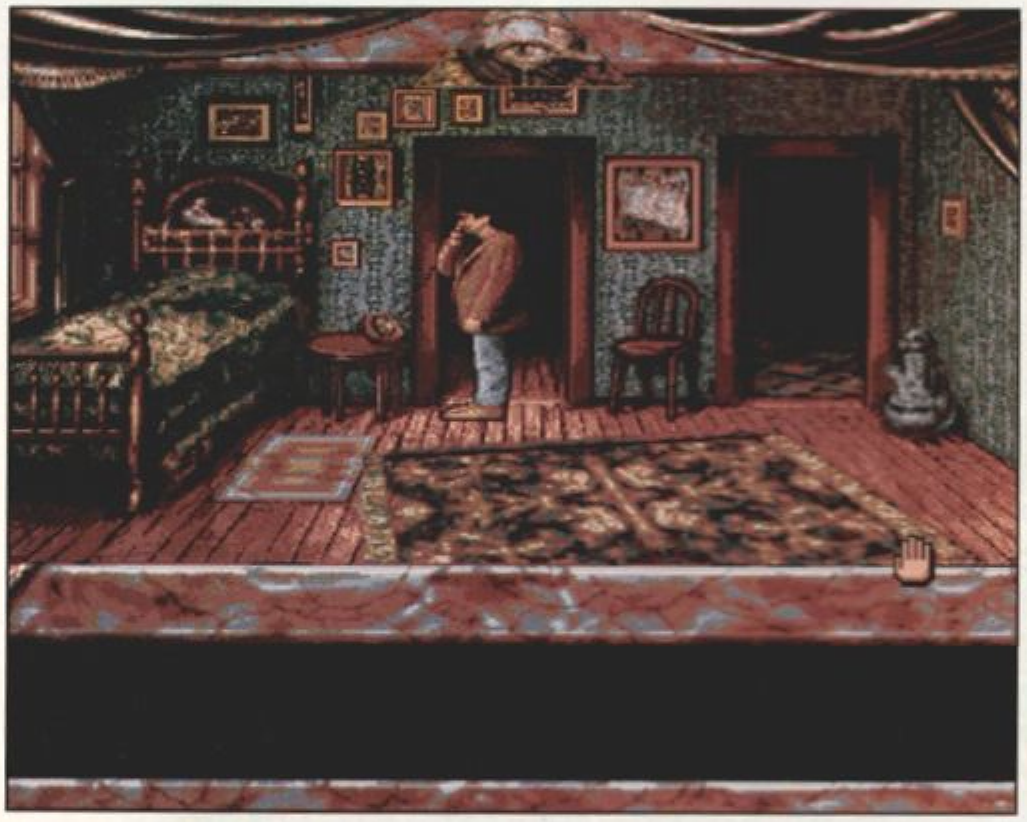
words, you may know from previous games that it's possible to perform a certain action, but still not be able to do it until Dawson has caught up with you in his current incarnation. This too is an approach taken in most modern animated adventures - it can become a bit of drag after a few plays but it's difficult to suggest an alternative that won't destroy the fabric of the story.

I don't think anyone would disagree that Dark Seed gives us pretty much the same pudding we were getting in 1983, but they've made considerable and significant improvements to the presentation.

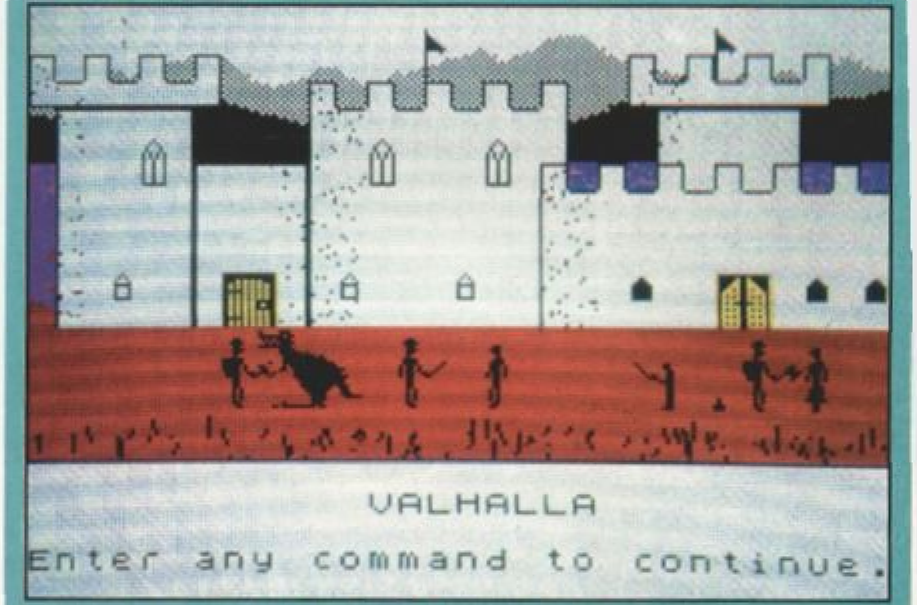
Most important of all, however, is that here we have further evidence that the animated adventure is an evolving vehicle for creative talent. By supporting this evidence with the recruitment of an internationally recognised artist, I suspect that Cyberdreams and Dark Seed may do more than most in 1992 to boost the image of video entertainment.





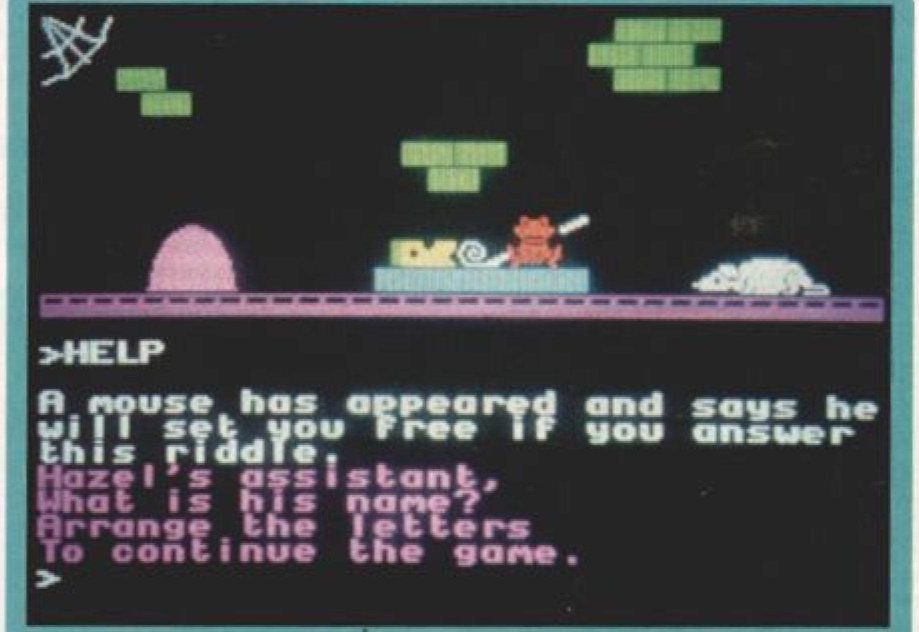
ANIMATED ANCESTORS

Animated adventures have come a long way since 1983. Here are a couple of stops along the road...



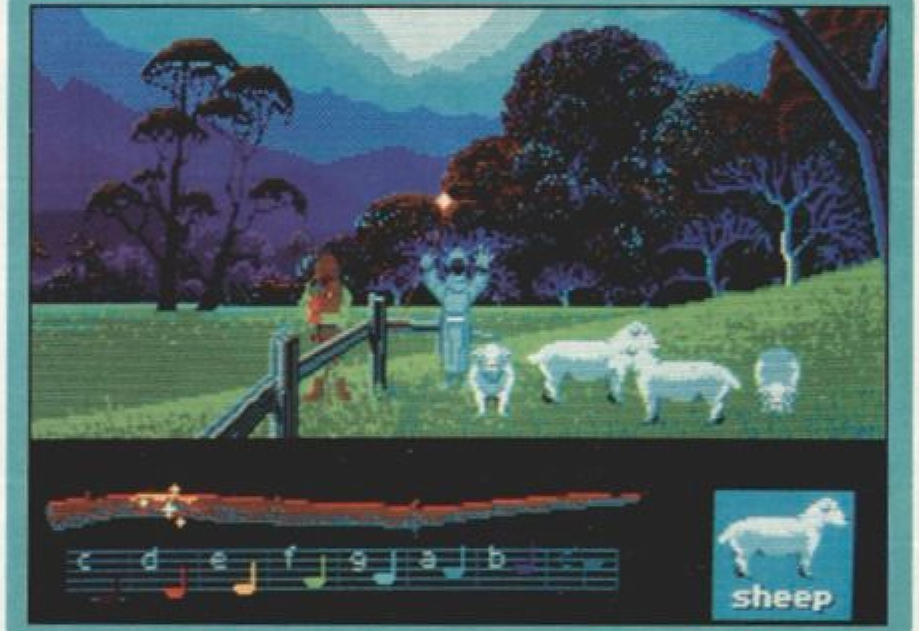
```
VALHALLA
Enter any command to continue.
```

Legend's Valhalla really got the ball rolling with characters that you could address directly, different graphic locations featuring 'live' action as the various bodies carried on with their lives and a key player character under your control - but that control was via text input: you couldn't move your character around with the joystick or keyboard.



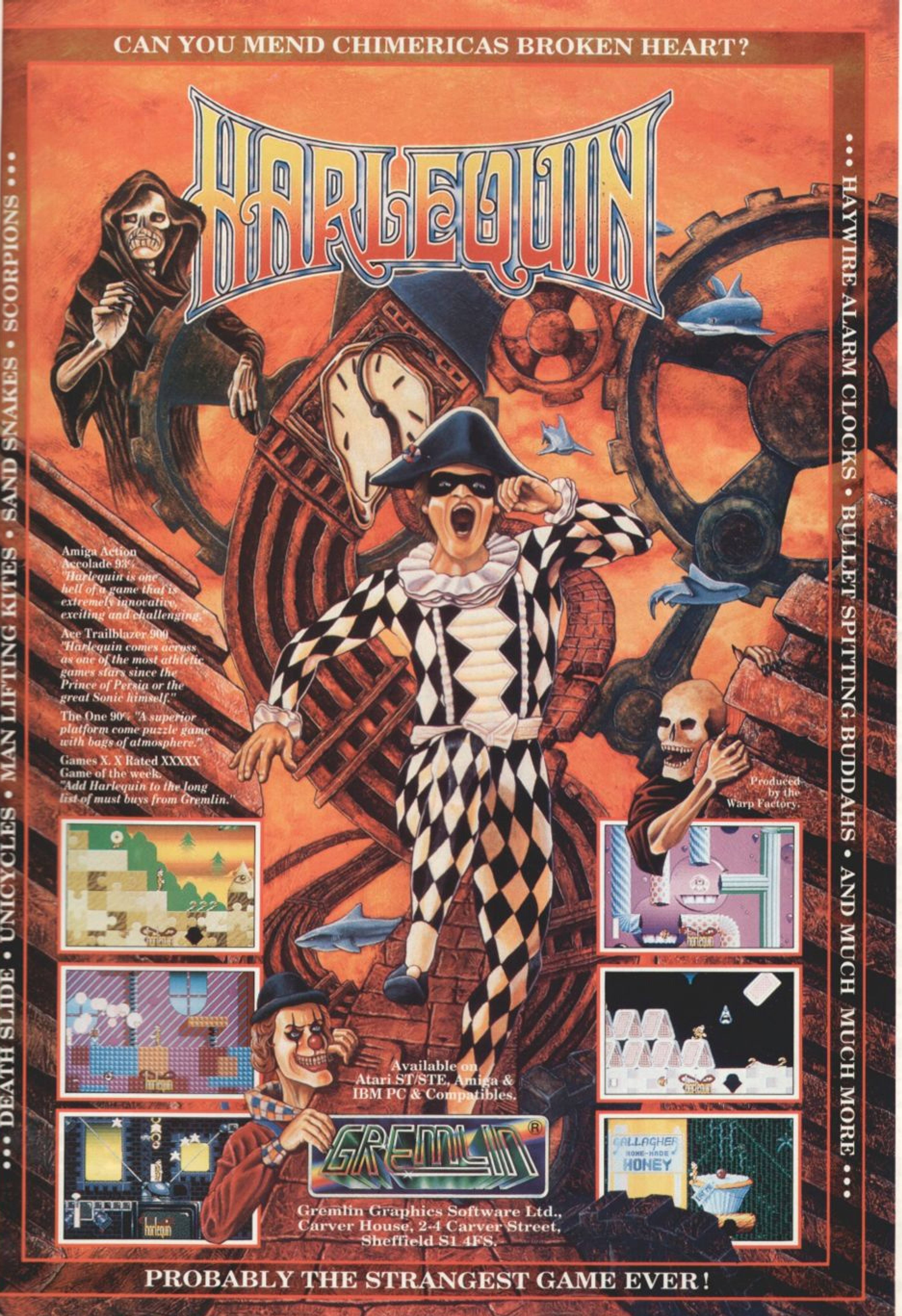
```
>HELP
A mouse has appeared and says he
will set you free if you answer
this riddle.
Hazel's assistant,
What is his name?
Arrange the letters
To continue the game.
>
```

The Witch's Cauldron from Mikrogen was somewhat similar to Valhalla in control mechanism, but it boasted better colour. Like many subsequent games, however, it seemed to trade better presentation for inferior game mechanics. Valhalla had some primitive but intriguing character 'intelligence' programming: games like The Witch's Cauldron had none.



(Left) Lucasfilm's Loom doesn't really offer anything that you couldn't find in The Witch's Cauldron, which you can either view as a shameful lack of innovation or proof of the power of a good game genre. I prefer the latter interpretation. Loom experimented much more than previous games with different camera angles. It also rescaled the central character as the camera angle required, but not dynamically (i.e. rescaling always took place with the character 'out of shot').

CAN YOU MEND CHIMERICAS BROKEN HEART?



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••• HAYWIRE ALARM CLOCKS • BULLET SPITTING BUDDAHS • AND MUCH MUCH MORE •••

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Ace Trailblazer 900 *"Harlequin comes across as one of the most athletic games stars since the Prince of Persia or the great Sonic himself."*

The One 90% *"A superior platform come puzzle game with bags of atmosphere."*

Games X. X Rated XXXXX Game of the week. *"Add Harlequin to the long list of must buys from Gremlin."*

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System Requirements:
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VGA/MCGA colour monitor
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AdLib, Roland MT-32/LAPC-1, CMS Soundblaster Sound Card*
*Required for speech.

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SCREENTEST

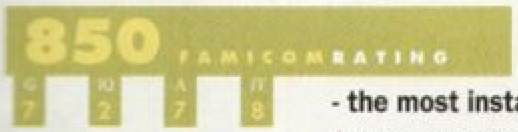
Stop, stop STOP! Don't turn that page! You're about to enter the Screentest section, a highly complex and thrill-packed environment, and you'll only get the best out of the next batch of pages if you know how to find your way around. So why don't you invest a few minutes reading through this guide, and fully versing yourself in the ins and outs of the ACE Screentest system? Not only will you come out the other end a more rounded person, but you'll know what all the little logos mean as well. So, without further ado let's get down to it and let's do it.

COMPARE ANDCONTRAST As an easy frame of reference, every game is compared to either another in the same genre, or maybe it's original coin-op or movie form.

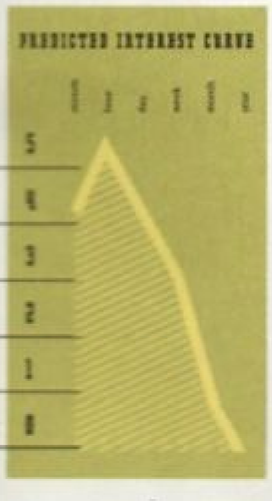
Xxx xx xx xx xxx xx xxxx xxx xxx xxx

Xxx xxx xxx xx xxxxxxx xxxx xxx

THUMBS UP & DOWN The most important positive and negative points in at-a-glance format. Maybe it's too tough, or lacks a two-player option etc.



RATING A score out of 1,000 - the most instant guage of a game's quality, further qualified with scores out of 10 for Graphics, Intelligence needed to enjoy the game, Audio and Fun factors.



PIC CURVE A prediction of the lifespan of the game's interest. An arcade blast may have lots of instant appeal, but will you still be playing in a month's time?

HINT Found on the centre pages of most reviews denoting - surprisingly enough - the location of a handy start-up tip.

TRAILBLAZER Awarded to games of outstanding all round quality, and generally viewed to further the art of games software production. A game bearing the Trailblazer logo should be bought without hesitation.

SOUND, GRAPHICS AND IDEA These awards go to games excelling in a particular area. A game which fails to get a Trailblazer for rounded fabness may still walk away with one of these.

ACE BENCHMARKS

A Benchmark game is, in our opinion, the very best in its particular Genre. By glancing at our description of the Benchmark, you will be able to decide if particular differences in a new game's design would make the current Benchmark or the new contender more or less appealing to you. Also, no software collection is complete unless it contains all the games listed here. If you're missing any, go and remedy the situation immediately.

ARCADE BLAST

SWIV (Storm)

Silkworm's follow-up succeeds through a combination of frenetic speed, polished presentation and sheer, unadulterated action. The firepower and wastage on screen is absolutely incredible. A coin-op in your own home!

ARCADE ADVENTURE

GODS (Renegade)

Not as intrinsically sophisticated as the likes of *Rick Dangerous* or *Prince of Persia* the Bitmaps' platform opus does offer enough fully-rounded arcade action to make it this category's outright winner.

ROLE PLAYING GAME

SHADOWLANDS (Domark)

Just what role players have been waiting for! This innovative RPG from Teque London packs all the strategy and depth of Dungeon Master *and* the arcade thrills of Moonstone. This is also the first outing of Teque's much talked of Photoscape system.

SPORTS ARCADE

KICK OFF 2 (Anco)

The primary reasons for Kick Off 2 being so playable are the ultra-instinctive control method and the remarkable speed. Not only is it the best soccer simulation ever, but one of the most enjoyable games of all time.

STRATEGY

CIVILIZATION (Microprose)

This awesome strategy epic has the player leading a race of people through technological and cultural expansion as civilisation develops through the ages. Heavyweight stuff, but the work of a genius.

ADVENTURE

MONKEY ISLAND 2 (US Gold/Lucasfilm)

Guy Threepwood returns in the latest SCUMM™ adventure from those ker-razy Kalifornian kooksters at Lucasfilm. A treat on the visual and audio fronts, and guaranteed laugh-a-minute rollercoaster of pun-tastic fun.

RACING SIMULATION

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX (Microprose)

It's almost impossible to find fault in this awesome game from Geoff Crammond. Packed with help for novice drivers and detail for experienced racers, it'll keep you driving in polygons for years.

BEAT'-EM-UP

IK+ (System 3)

An upgraded and enhanced version of the original System 3 classic, Archer Macleans IK+ is still unchallenged in its field after three years. Its most innovative aspect is the addition of a third computer controlled fighter. Incredibly speed.

RACING GAME

***STUNT CAR RACER* (Microstyle)**

Polygon power and arcade speed thrills mix in this novel race jaunt. Race around elevated raceways, smashing and crashing your opponent into oblivion. Growling audio and a weird-look novelty too.

SPORTS SIMULATION

JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER (Virgin)

Tremendous 3D combines with authentic play and amazing realism to make this the Sports Sim benchmark. Virtually beyond criticism, the game boasts the utmost accuracy and easy beginner's tutorial.

SIMULATION

FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum Holobyte)

Quite possibly the best flying game ever written. Falcon 3.0 has more detail than anything you've seen in your life and the friendliest use interface and manual to guide even new players through its vast complexity.

ACTION STRATEGY

POPULOUS 2 (Electronic Arts)

Bigger, better, faster, smoother, etc etc. Bullfrog have toiled for many man-years to produce this sequel which succeeds in making the original *Populous* look pretty basic - not a feat to be sneezed at.

PUZZLE GAME

TETRIS (Nintendo)

Nintendo's official Gameboy version of this game is undoubtedly the best. Line up the blocks in frenetic black & white action in a quest to make solid lines. May sound crap but is actually fantastic. Arguably the most addictive game *ever* - you ask anyone who has played it!

PLATFORM GAME

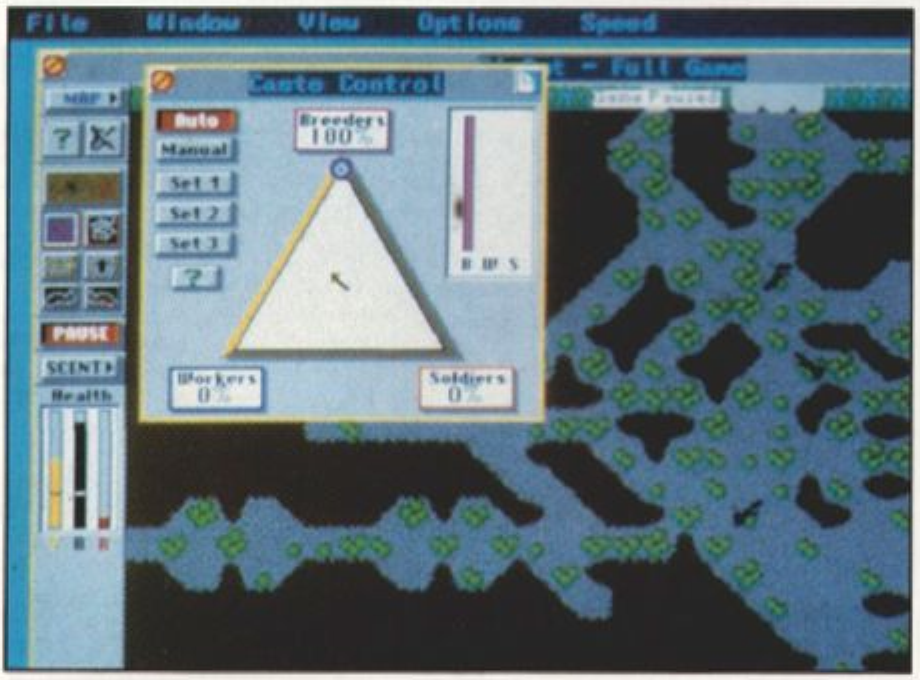
SUPER MARIO WORLD (Nintendo)

With the Super Nintendo due to arrive in March, UK punters will soon be wowed by this classic previously only available to owners of grey imported machines. Excellent graphics and a HUGE play area. If only all games could be *this* good.

Genre 'Software Toy'
Publisher Maxis (Distributed in Europe by Ocean)
Developer Will Wright and Justin McCormick
Price £34.99

SIMANT

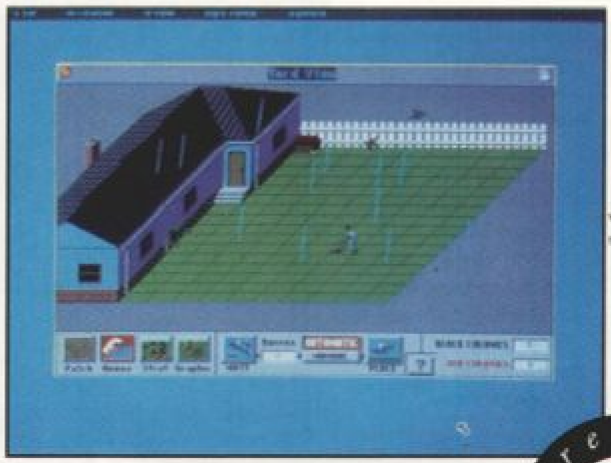
The word simulation simply isn't good enough for the boys and girls at Maxis. No way. Following an alternative agenda to the rest of the games developers out there in videogame land, they like to play with 'software toys'. That's California freestyle for you. So, what the heck can one of these new age programs actually do? Does your computer really come to life, then? The main claim to fame is Maxis tries to make the whole affair more flexible than ordinary games. While both follow strict preordained rules, a 'software toy' allows personal goals to be pursued. Part of the fun comes from figuring out how the underlying system works and taking command of it. In other words, you are encouraged to create, explore and control new environments and worlds. Yes, we've got a love thang. As Maxis puts it, players are rewarded for creativity, experimentation and understanding - not for rote memory or knuckle-jerk reflexes.



The first two 'software toys', SimCity and SimEarth, have both won critical and consumer acclaim in Europe, USA and Japan for their fusion of fun and skill. With SimAnt, the word 'edutainment' is being more strongly emphasised. Can you really learn from and, more importantly, enjoy the process of managing an electronic ant colony? That's the make or break question which must have worried Maxis throughout the production stages of this unusual release. At least the neat idea of this project goes some way to squash any initial reservations from players. Most people are fascinated by these very industrious social insects. Ants are part of human folklore and regularly make their presence felt at idyllic picnics in the countryside or the sugar jar back home. Now you can peek and poke around almost any aspect of their daily habits in minute detail without the need of a Thomas Salter microscope and some rusty old tweezers.

Based around accurate scientific information on ant goings on, SimAnt provides an insight into life as an ant. What do they prefer to eat? How do they defend the nest from hungry predators? Why do they leave scent trails around your back

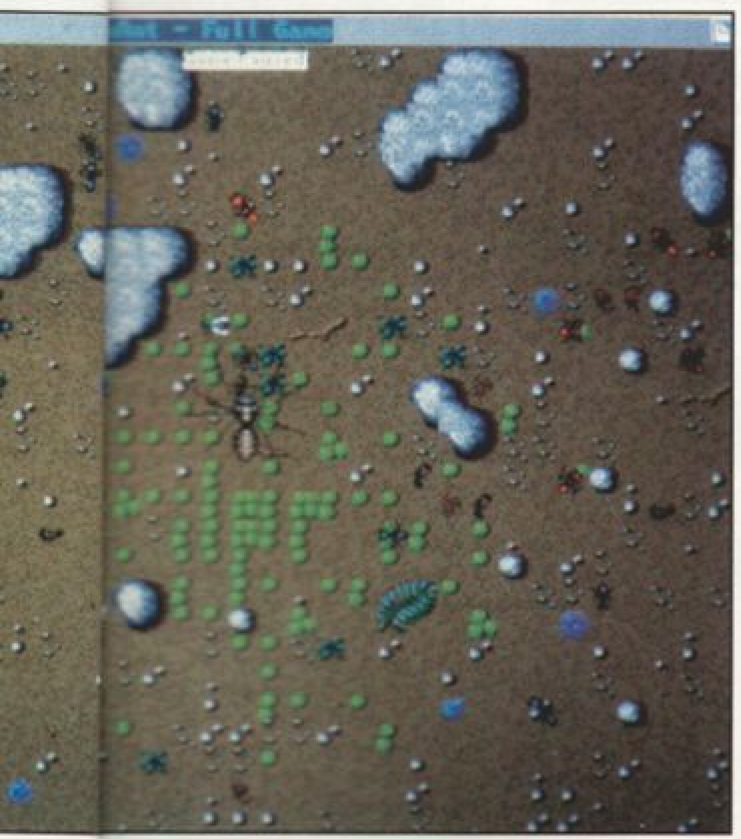
MAP
?
PAUSE
SCENT
Health

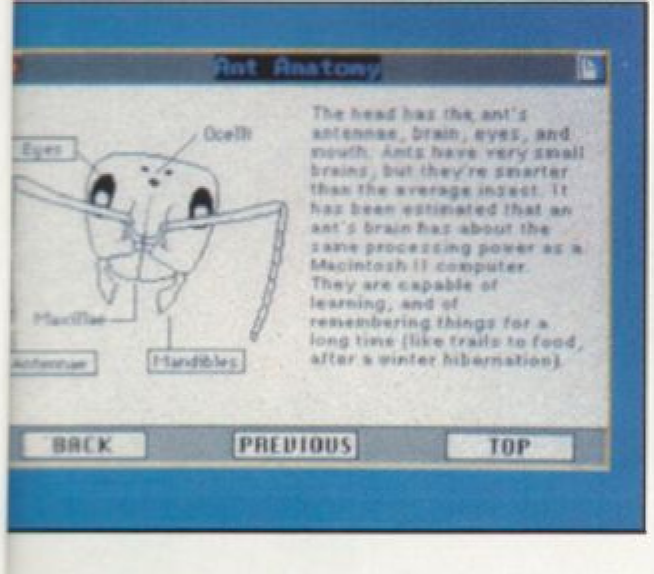


garden and kitchen? All these questions are not only answered, you must also learn from them in order to be successful as a captain of ant industry. Gaining experience through experimentation is the name of this game, oops, sorry about that, 'software toy'.

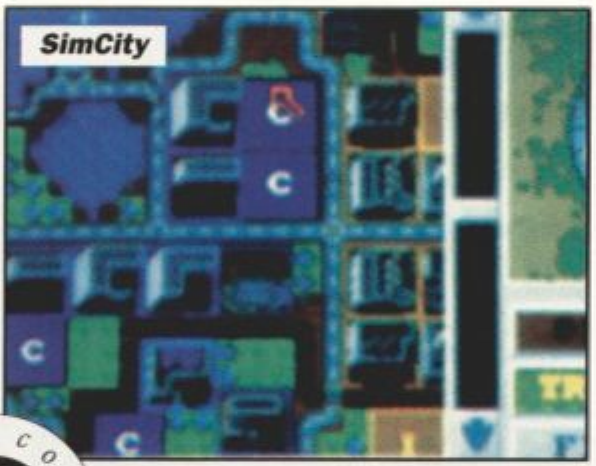
After reading an influential and revealing book about our small pesky friends, the main brains behind SimAnt, Will Wright and Justin McCormick, asked for assistance and general guidance from one of the Harvard University professors responsible for this Pulitzer Prize winning work. Edward Wilson did a most respectable job as ant guru, making sure every detail was factually correct. I've certainly never seen this much information on ants before. Did you know, for instance, that ants regulate the temperature and humidity within their nests by controlling the airflow through the various pathways enclosed? This is just one startling snippet of trivia from literally hundreds contained inside the game and comprehensive 176-page manual. There's also a hypertext-style information window which can be used at any point during the simulation to reveal useful scientific facts and a few strategies for succeeding at SimAnt.

Maxis obviously likes to take big risks with any software project that comes along. In a potentially damaging and very unusual experiment, SimAnt is the first game from Maxis without any form of copy protection. It certainly makes a change to forget those bothersome password systems before playing the game every time but is it worth the chance of total piracy? These people hope you will not steal their work by giving away copies of SimAnt to your friends and colleagues. They reckon copy protection is a pain in the butt for everyone and would like to stop using it from now on. This, of course, depends on the reaction from you. Another interesting development, eh?





The head has the ant's antennae, brain, eyes, and mouth. Ants have very small brains, but they're smarter than the average insect. It has been estimated that an ant's brain has about the same processing power as a Macintosh II computer. They are capable of learning, and of remembering things for a long time (like trails to food, after a winter hibernation).



compare & contrast

SimAnt must obviously be rated against the other innovative creations from Will Wright. Forgetting the C64 classic Raid on Bungeling Bay published by Broderbund, Wright is best known for SimCity and SimEarth. Now, I've never been a fan of the latter 'software toy'. It's far too complicated and doesn't even feel anything like amusement. SimAnt scores over SimEarth, therefore, on successfully mixing entertainment and education. Nevertheless, SimCity remains the best of the brood. This is probably because it's the closest to a straight game out of the three.

The basic idea of SimAnt is to oversee a colony of black ants in the Quick Game or take over the entire backyard in a Full Game. The garden and house are actually divided up into almost 200 separate sections known as patches. Each of these can hold a single colony of black and red ants. With a fast bit of nonsense calculation, you could be herding thousands of ants in no time at all. The reds are under the influence of the program itself in the Quick and Full Games. On a slightly less grand scale, Tutorial and Experimentation modes make up the other four choices available at the start of play.

An Experimentation Game sounds like one of those trendy teaching methods much loved in the '80s. You've got a free hand to muck around with a group of electronic ants without the handicap of any set aim or direction. That's right, you make your own excitement in this one. There is no winning or losing in Experimental Games, that would be far too competitive for modern thinkin' free-expression educators. Instead, a full set of tools are included to test your investigative nature. The idea is to increase or decrease the size of every colony, dig holes anywhere you like, construct a series of ground obstacles to overcome, and see what happens. The only option missing here is a bottle of meths and a box of matches to torch the nest. Warning! Don't try this at home kids, it's cruel and nasty.

The word 'edutainment' is being more strongly emphasised. Can you really learn from and, more importantly, enjoy the process of managing an electronic ant colony?

Back on more mainstream matters, you're the big boss of the black ants. So, naturally enough, you're yellow!?! I guess this to distinguish you from lower members of the outfit. It's a hard life commanding a bunch of bugs. Luckily, they busily go about their business without your help every step of the way. Using a selection of windows, icons and sliders, you're supposed to lead them to tasty morsels of food or into victory against the rival red ant colony. This is achieved by altering the behaviour and biology makeup of the entire colony. Deciding how many workers will forage for food or nurse up-and-coming ant babies are just two of the many factors which need to be taken into consideration. If the black or red queen dies before another colony has been formed, the simulation will soon come to an end because you can no longer produce more offspring.

Most of the action is played out within the Edit Window. This gives a close-up of the ant's world. It only shows part of the patch at a time, either underground in the nest or outside on the dangerous surface. Recognisable items like rocks, caterpillars and dead ants can be seen here. Slightly less obvious, is the occasional giant human foot that can splat several ants at once or the strange ant lions which wait under the surface to snap up their favourite food... you!

Other views of the SimAnt universe are available in the Map Window. A strategic graph can

▶34

SIMANT

"Ants are so much like human beings as to be an embarrassment. They farm fungus, raise aphids as livestock, launch armies into war, use chemical sprays to alarm and confuse enemies, capture slaves, engage in child labour, and exchange information ceaselessly. They do everything but watch television."

Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell*

"The biology of ants is about the history of societies and institutions, and about the future of cities and computers."

Kevin Kelley

"They taste salty."

Cassidy Wright

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise."

Proverb

"Not so much the weight of an ant in earth or heaven escapes from the Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but is clearly written in God's book."

The Koran 10:16

"As a thinker and a planner the ant is the equal of any savage race of men; as a self-educated specialist in several arts she is the superior of any savage race of men; and in one or two high mental qualities she is above the reach of any man, savage or civilised."

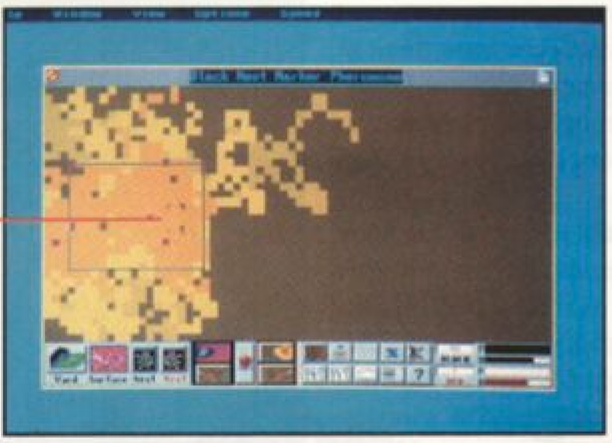
Mark Twain, *What is Man?*

"None preaches better than the ant, and she says nothing."

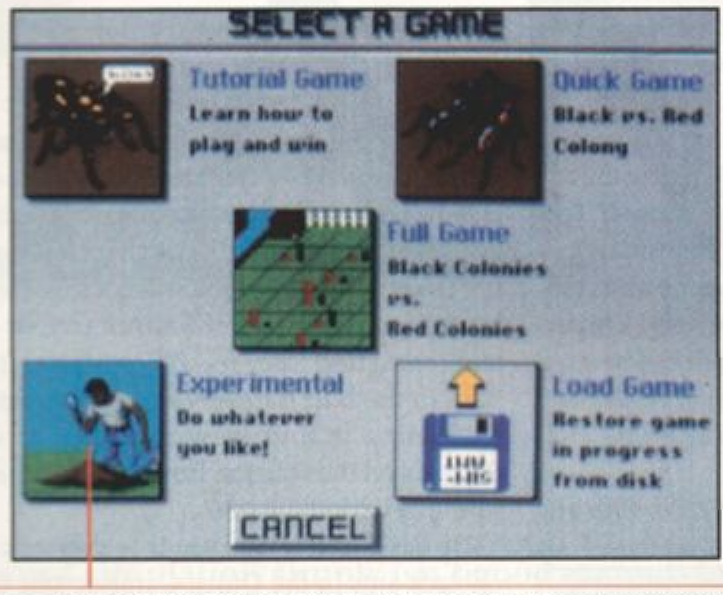
Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanac*

"We'll set thee to school to an ant, to teach thee there's no labouring i' the winter."

Shakespeare, *King Lear act 2, scene 4*

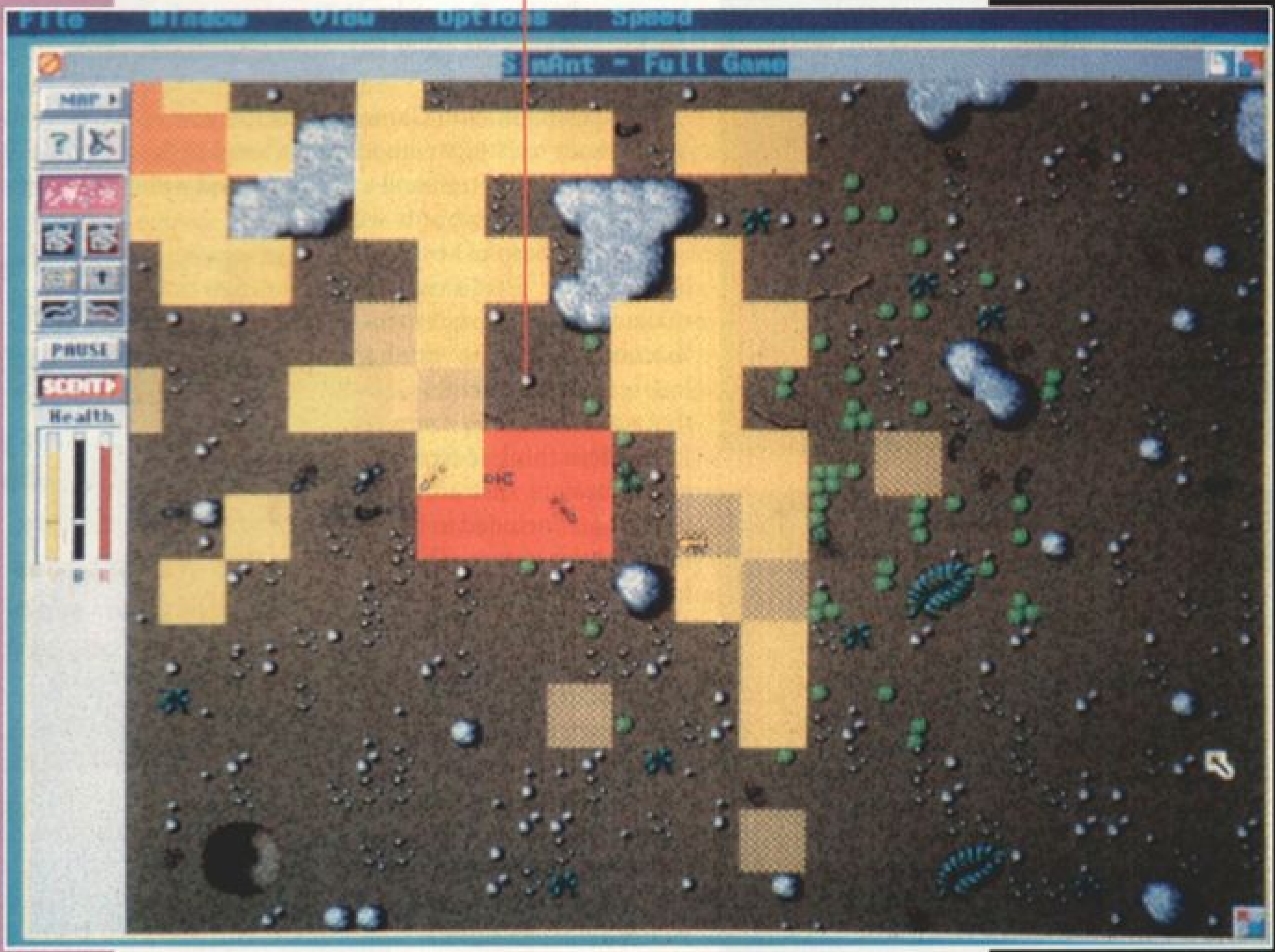


This is what your back garden looks like to the average ant. Chemical scent trails are left by ants as they return home with food. Other ants will then smell the trail and follow it. In SimAnt, you use this to your advantage when pinpointing food and the red ant nest. Warning! Rain washes these useful pongs away.



You've got a free hand with the Experimental Game option. There's nothing more satisfying than commanding a whopping great big army of black ants against the rest of the backyard bugs. Alternatively, you can force ants into individual suicide missions among a flood of hungry ant lions and spiders. Great stuff, eh?

If there is a lot of food, set some ants in alarm mode to guard it. If the red ant nest is close by, use any small pebbles in the surrounding area to build some makeshift barricades. Really sneaky ant commanders will lead the spider to the enemy nest and let her feast on these helpless souls as they leave the entrance hole.



(Right) One way to defeat your enemy is to quickly raid the red nest and dig lots of very deep tunnels. If the red queen goes further underground she might drown when rain floods the lower sections.

Carefully watch the red ants to spot their 'Terminator'. This rascal is the equivalent of you, so, if this rebel leader is squashed the red ants will temporarily flounder during a crucial moment.

(Right) After the lonely human has *tried to kill you* with the lawn mower, he'll resort to insecticide once you've reached the interior of his lovely home. Any ant left above ground will die if this nasty stuff is freely sprayed around. Be careful...

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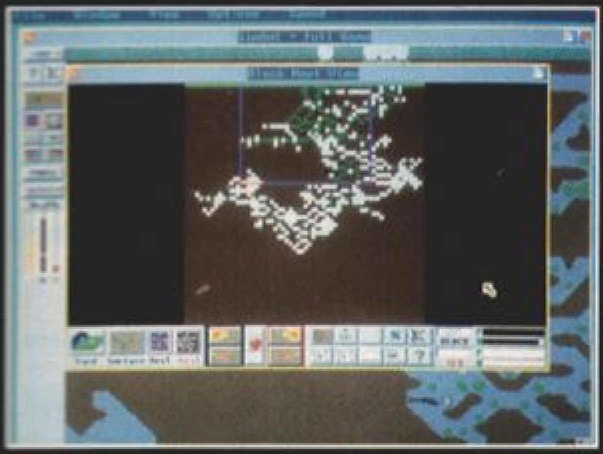
SimAnt - Full Game
Black Nest View

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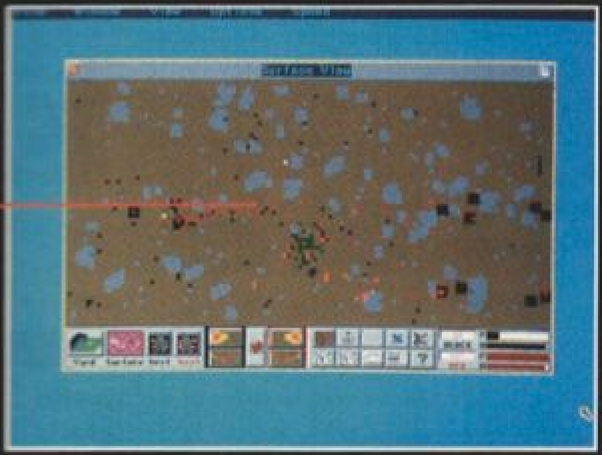
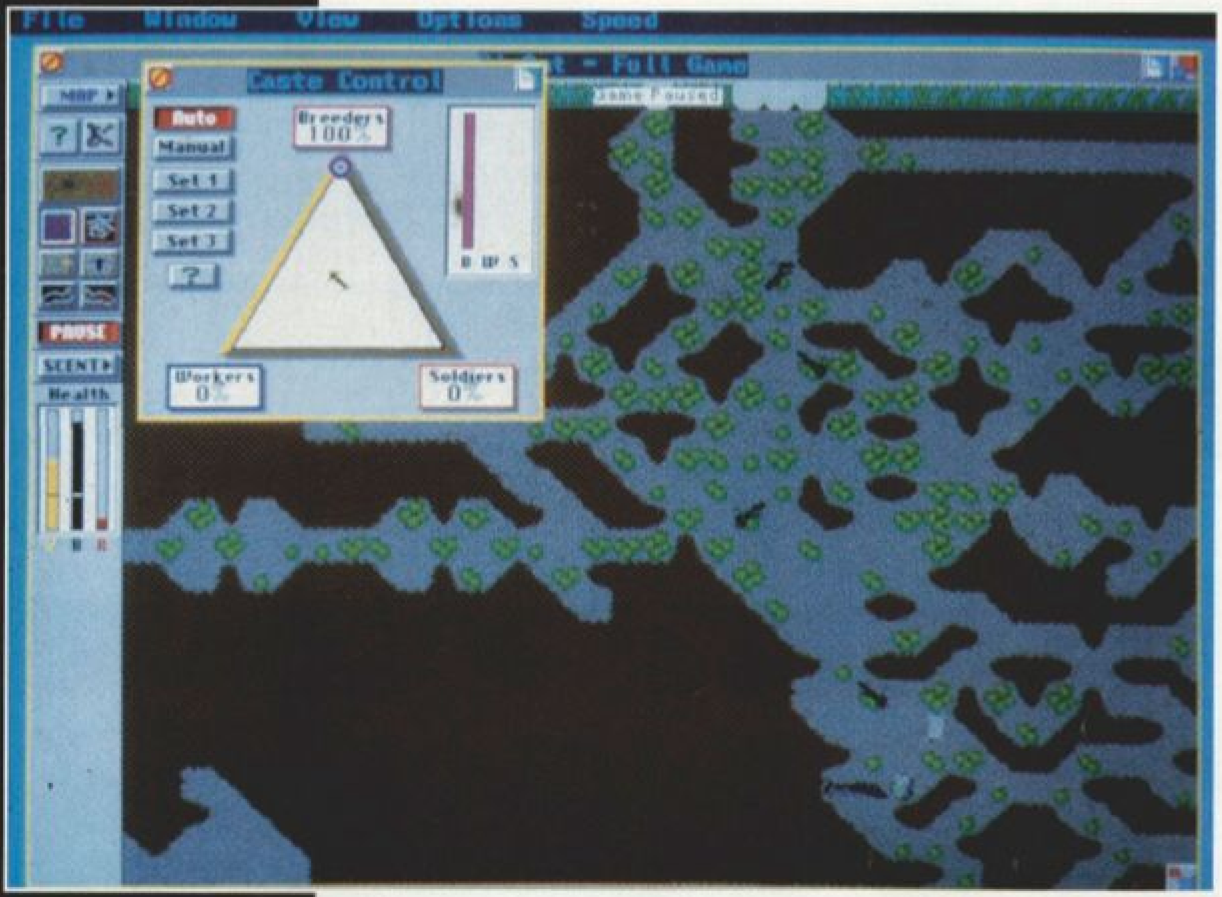

Surface View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Auto
Manual
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Set 2
Set 3
Breeders 100%
Workers 0%
Soldiers 0%
MAP
PAUSE
SCENT
Health
Game Paused

This is a smashing idea to spread out and conquer the opposition in no time at all, provided you don't mind sacrificing a single colony first. Gather lots of grub, then start the little breeders going full blast. Soon, you'll have plenty of queens to invade the rest of the garden.

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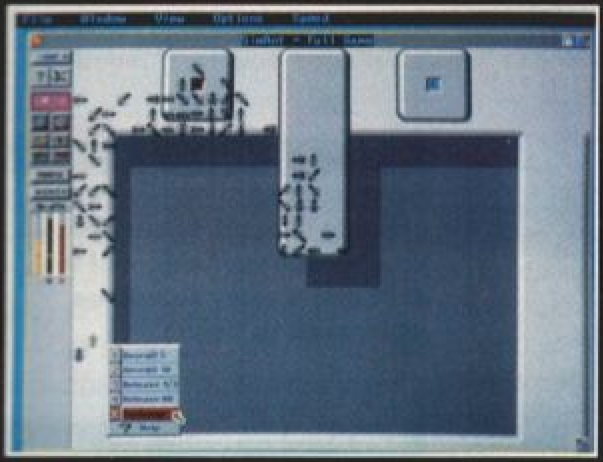
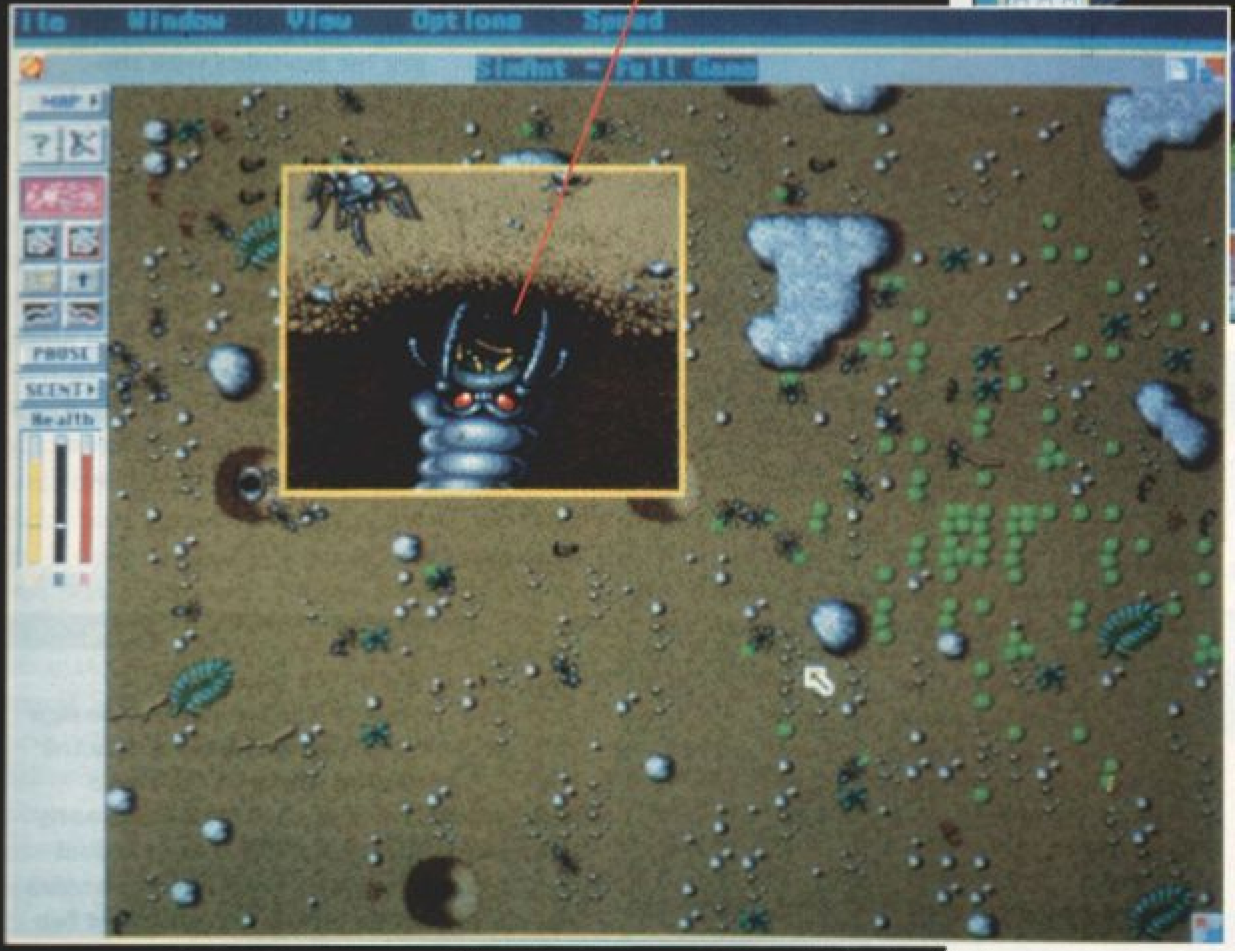

SimAnt - Full Game

A horrible ant lion makes a move on you. Of course, they're not really lions or ants at all!?! These larvae of a dragonfly type insect bury themselves in the ground. When an unsuspecting ant slips down this pit, it is mercilessly feasted upon. Try to avoid them, even though a squad of determined ants can kill and eat them up.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SimAnt - Full Game
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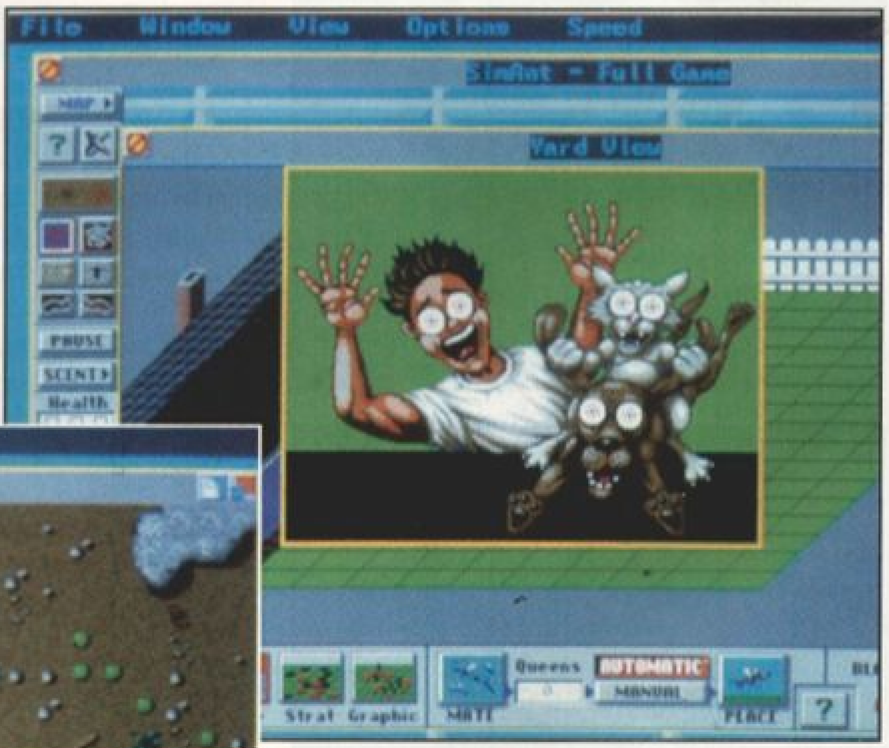
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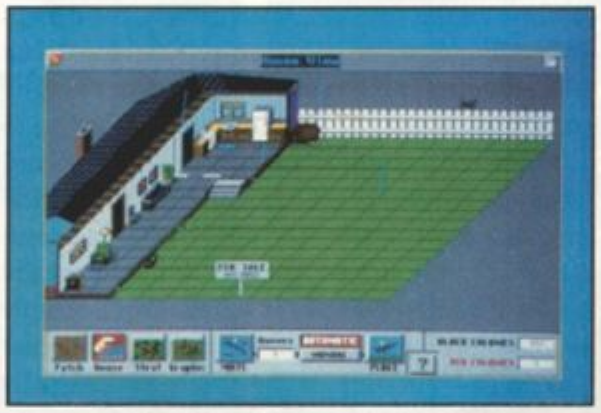
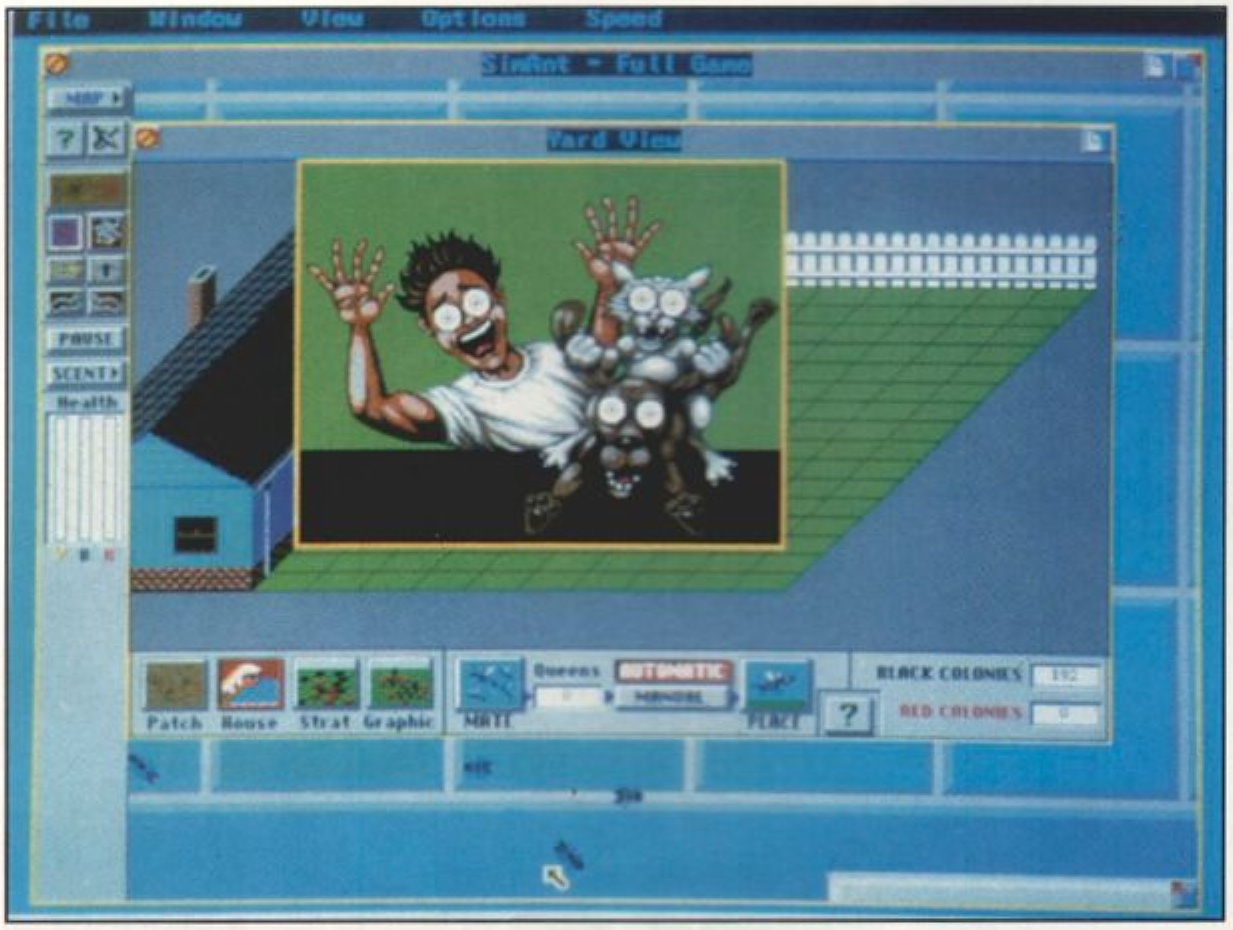
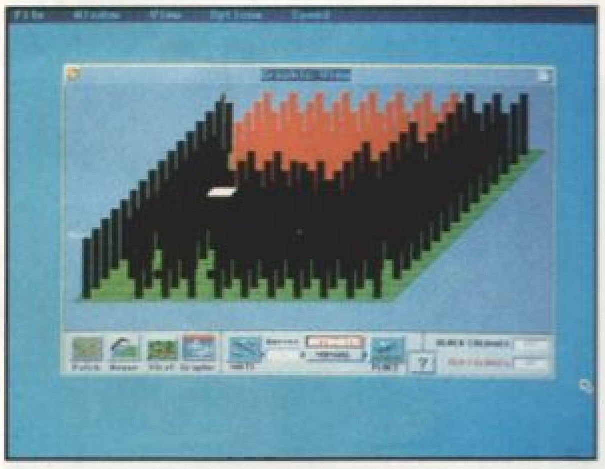
AUTOMATIC
MANUAL
PLACE

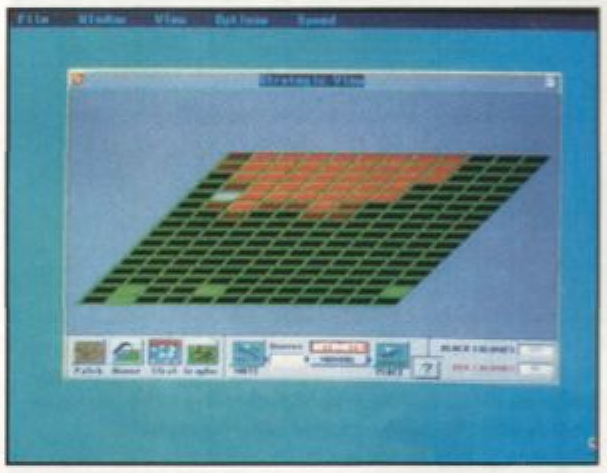
Hmmm, this is the ultimate destination. Can't you just taste all those delicious goodies lurking inside the cupboards and the cracks of that comfy armchair? Absolutely. Where are our fabby tips for getting there without any unnecessary hassles? Nowhere, matey. Find out for yourself you lazy git...


House View
FOR SALE

SIMANT







31▶

divulge who is lagging behind in the race to colonise all the patches. Alternatively, the deceptively tranquil scene of a man and his dog doing the gardening can be chosen. Little does this guy know that, sooner or later, the ants are going to triumph and oust his family from this home and eat all the goodies in the kitchen. Even insecticide shouldn't stop a determined ant from overall domination. On the subject of death, it doesn't really matter if your yellow ant is killed. You'll simply be reborn in the next ant that hatches. One great trick in the repertory, is the ability to physically swap bodies with other black ants. So, for example, if you're going on a dangerous raid against a red ant nest you can become a soldier ant and have a better chance for survival in the ferocious attacks that will occur. It should be noted that if you still manage to get yourself slapped about, the black ants will be momentarily undirected and the whole battle could be lost. It's wise to stay just behind the main thrust of your ant invaders and only set in if you want them to edge closer to the enemy HQ. Sneaky is the way to do it properly. The red ants actually have the equivalent of you leading them on. If this Red Terminator can be found and destroyed the red ants will flounder for a few brief but crucial seconds.

Sound effects can contribute to your success, too. If you ever hear the sound of a lawn mower drawing closer, quickly duck under ground or you could be really cut up by the experience. It doesn't take long for the surrounding area to be littered with the garbage of complete and utter war such as hideously torn limbs and severed heads. The spider is far less frightening and dangerous. Maxis just included her in there for some laughs. If you switch the appropriately titled silly mode on, you're able to see what all these insects are thinking about in speech bubbles above their heads. Please remember, this is American family humour before judging the quality of gags on display.

The first casualty of war maybe innocence but in SimAnt it's merely a question of achieving numerical superiority over the enemy, then going in fast and kicking ant without mercy. If the tide is turning against you, start breeding before the nest is overrun, and try your luck on the next patch. Think on a global scale, don't concern yourself with the success or failure of individual skirmishes. That's how the real ants get on with the game of life and they've done a pretty good job in the past 60 million years of existence.

PC Version

Make no mistake, SimAnt looks and sounds pretty much the same on all formats. This is a bad mistake, for instance, when only 16 colours are used in the VGA graphics mode. What a waste, eh? Getting down to mundane everyday matters, this comfortably endowed adaption supports EGA, VGA, MCGA, Hercules, Tandy Graphics, AdLib, Soundblaster, Sound Master and Tandy Sound. At least 640K RAM and a hard drive with 2.5MB of free storage space are required. Don't bother playing SimAnt without a Microsoft-compatible mouse attached. Maxis has already begun work on an enhanced update of SimAnt for use with the phenomenally popular Windows operating system. Strange but true, Microsoft has sold an incredible 10 million copies of Windows so far.

Amiga Version

After the annoying delay with SimEarth, Maxis is personally handling the Amiga variation of this one. It should be ready for release within the next couple of months.

ST Version

Sorry, there are currently no plans to convert SimAnt onto your computer. Letters of disgust and dismay should be addressed to Ocean.

Super Famicom Version

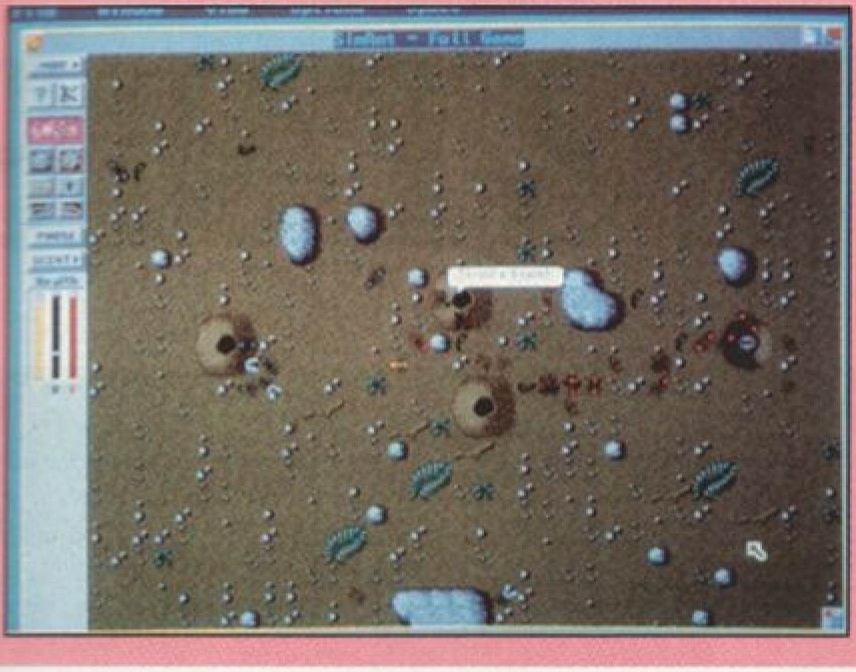
Leading Japanese games publisher Imagineer is always hungry for anything with the calibre of SimCity or Populous. That's why the crafty company has licensed a squillion console conversions of popular computer games from Maxis and Bullfrog. However, this adaption of SimAnt isn't going to be any good to us without the inclusion of some good old English text! Like SimCity and Populous before it, a nice mousy gadget is desperately needed to make things happen properly. Shifting a pointer around using the joypad is a real pain in the thumb. Get it sorted somebody?!?

Gameboy Version

What 'yer talking about, Maxis? Apparently the design team responsible for SimAnt fiddled around with some experimentation graphics during the early development stages of the game. A decision on the viability of such a monumental conversion to this handy little deck of fun and frolics has yet to be made.

ANT NO STOPPING 'EM

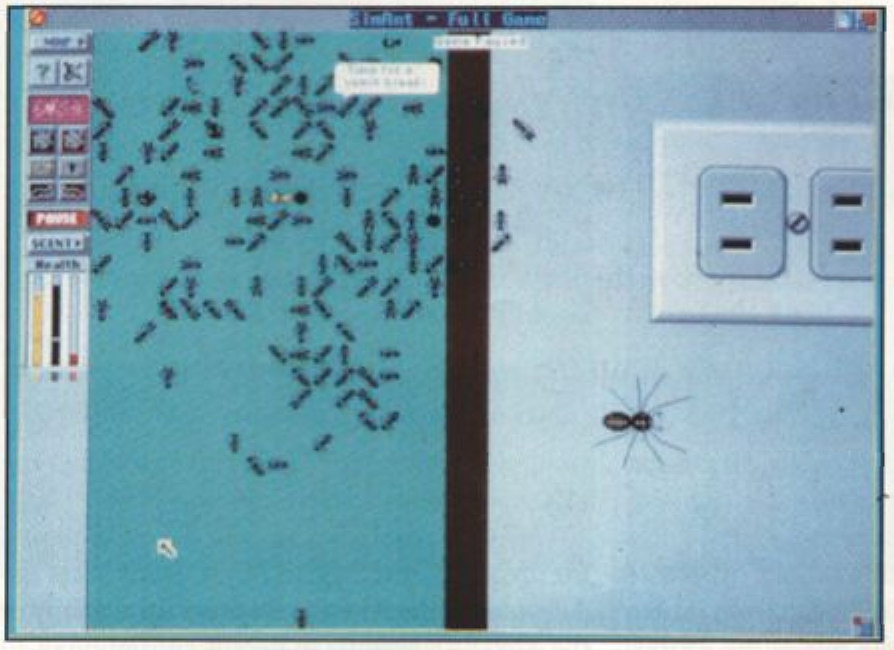
One of the oldest living creatures in the world, ants live everywhere except in the coldest or highest regions around. At any given moment there are at least 1015 living ants on the earth. Like sharks, they haven't physically changed much in millions of years. Ants are also the strongest creatures around in relation to their size and can carry a back-breaking load of 10 to 20 times their body weight. Being social insects, they can call upon the rest of the colony to help lift anything heavier than this. Ants have no feelings of fear, pity of mercy. They are the Terminators of the insect world and will always be back for more. Their only reason to live is to ensure the survival of the colony, even at the cost of many individual sacrifices. They're in a constant state of war with other ants and even enslave their defeated opponents and force them to work the nest or become an instant source of food. There's no health scheme or rosy retirement plan for an ant, either. Any weak or old members of the community are eaten. Sometimes ants will eat their own eggs during times of food shortages. Yuk! These are just a few of the interesting facts revealed in SimAnt...

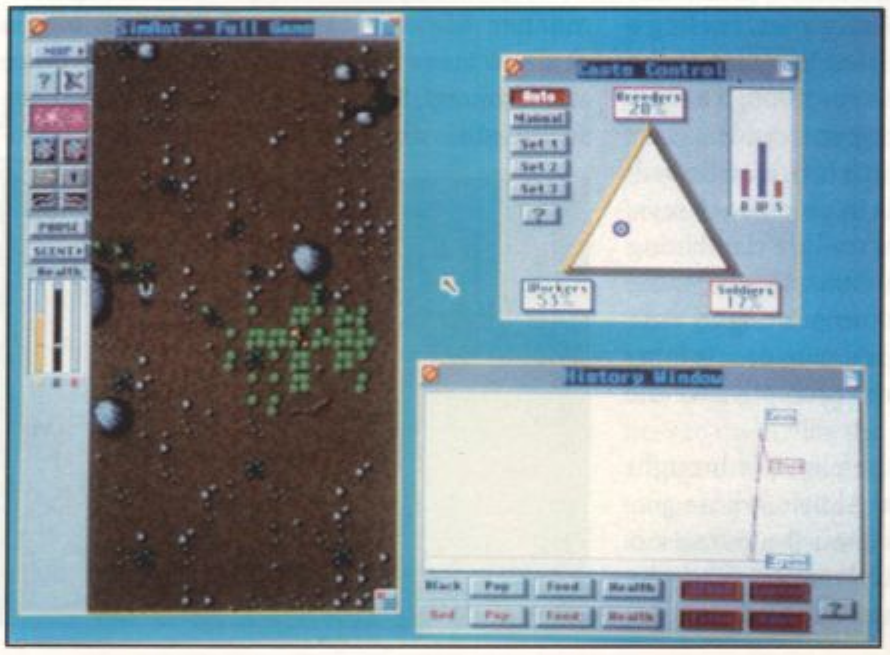


SimAnt definitely won't win any Oscars for its special effects or music score. Presentation is where Maxis badly falls down. Compared to something like Populous II, SimAnt looks and sounds primitive in the extreme. Sure, some of it is cute but many of the window designs supplied would also sit comfortably in a boring business package. If Bullfrog has proved anything, it's that strategy games don't have to remain in the dark ages of computer games. What about a sparkle of imagination and a screen scrolling routine that doesn't pause the whole game when it's invoked? I'm not kidding, guys. Quicksilva's Ant Attack on the Sinclair Spectrum has much better graphics than this! While I'm thinking fondly of this great game, isn't it about time Sandy White came out of retirement to produce a superior 16-bit edition? Too right.

At the end of the day, when all is said and done, the lack of traditional gaming methods will drive you mad with frustration, and eventually, outright boredom. This sad factor just can't be ignored and quickly puts a strain on a otherwise excellent product. It's just too much of an ANTi-climax. Let's hope Maxis can rectify this devastating problem before the release of SimBee, SimBarbie or whatever else they dream and conjure up next time around. Still, it's worth a look if you're after something truly different from the endless supply of flight simulations, platform romps and graphic adventures coming thick, fast and from all directions at the moment. For that fact alone, we should be deeply grateful.

• Rik Haynes





RATINGS

Unusual way to discover everything you ever wanted to know about ants.

Hey kids, SimAnt stops parents complaining about mindless shoot'em-ups messing with your attitude and outlook on life.

More entertaining than SimEarth.

Accounts software has stretched the capabilities of your PC beyond what's on offer here.

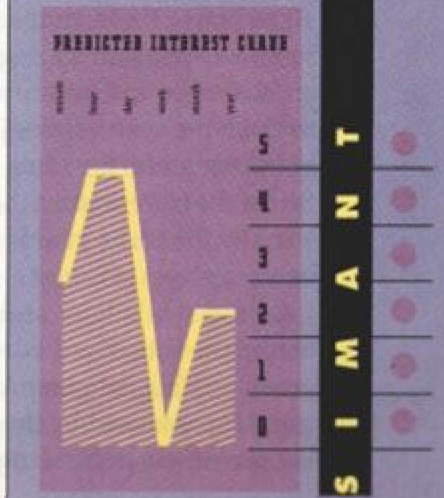
Needs an injection of extra game elements like a two-player option or some difficulty levels.

Less entertaining than SimCity.

777 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
3	7	2	8

What's going on? With all these different windows to study and manipulate, this is almost certainly going to be your gut reaction within the first ten minutes of play. It won't take long to master the simulation once you've managed to settle down and play around a bit. Ultimately, the problem with SimAnt stems from a lack of play enthusiasm in the medium term. You don't really fancy having another go after completing the game for the first time. Probably the only reason for going back inside the box would be to read up on ant tricks and trivia in the brilliANT manual supplied. That fine line between entertainment and education has crossed too far into the wrong direction for these so-called 'software toys'. Better luck next time, Maxis.



RATINGS

SIMANT

Genre Role-Playing Game
Publisher Origin
Developer Blue Sky Productions
Release £TBA Late March

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN

Stunning. That's the only word to describe Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss. Actually, that's not quite true. There are loads more. Roughly two thousand, in fact, enough to fill six pages. But I'll get to them in a minute. For now, 'stunning' is the only single adjective that completely sums up the whole Underworld experience.

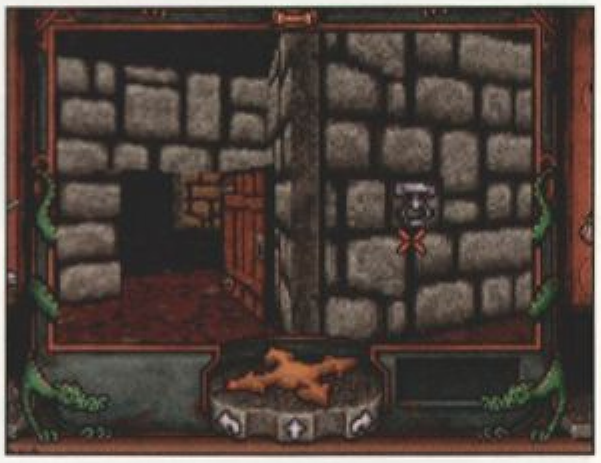
And what an experience it is. It's the closest thing I've seen to Virtual Reality - You can't stop me! I've said it now! - on a home computer.

But before I start getting into serious hyperbole territory, let's get the plot out of the way. Once again the player assumes the role of the Avatar, hero of many previous Ultima games. Feeling a strange and urgent compulsion to return to the land of Britannia, the player steps through a magical moongate... and straight into trouble.

The player finds himself in a lavish castle bedroom where a kidnapping is in progress. A mysterious mage and his servant troll are clambering through the open window, an unconscious young girl slung under the slimy monster's mighty arm. Before the player can act the bedroom door is flung open by the castle guards who promptly take the hapless player prisoner.

A short while later and the player is brought before the sour-faced Baron Almric, whose gorgeous pouting daughter Arial was the kidnap victim. Unconvinced by the explanation as to why the player was in his daughter's room (come on, would you believe it?) the Baron orders that the player rescue his stolen child.

Witnesses saw the wizard and the troll entering the dreaded Great Stygian Abyss. Many years ago a devotee of the Avatar's ways set up a colony in the Abyss's labyrinthian depths consisting of all manner of weird and wonderful Britannia denizens to see if they could ever co-exist in peace and harmony. Some hope. The colony soon dissolved into anarchy, with differing factions splintering away from the main group and forming their own communities in various parts of the Abyss. (Okay, so it's hardly the most plausible explanation as to why the Abyss has so many differing creatures in such close proximity, but it'll have to do.)



The Baron's guards escort the player to the entrance to the Abyss and throw him inside. As the mighty door slams shut behind him, the player hears the chief guard shouting that the player will not be allowed to leave unless he's accompanied by Arial...

As usual, all this preamble is conveyed by a long animated intro. It's no better or worse than any other of it's type, although those with a Soundblaster fitted to their PC will enjoy the odd laugh or two at the stilted digitised speech recorded for the characters by various Origin staff members, including Richard 'Lord British' Garriott himself. (Scream!) Particularly chuckle-worthy is the guard's voice - 'eees gort er Corkney accent thert's abart ers loikely ers Dick Vin Doike's in Mairy Porpins. (Embarrassing but true, the guard's voice was recorded by Martin Galway, who is actually British born and bred.)

Before any actual dungeoneering can take place, the player has to go through the usual RPG chore of knocking together some stats to make a fantasy alter-ego to explore the game world with. To be fair, Underworld's designer's have made this, the most boring aspect of RPGs, pretty painless - the player only has to make a few simple Yes/No decisions to get up and running.

The only real poser given to the player is which of the eight professions he wants to take up. There's the usual wizard or warrior but more exotic livelihoods are available for those who want to try something a little out of the ordinary. For some reason I was drawn to being a shepherd - don't ask me why. Characters are defined by four main characteristics; strength, dexterity, intelligence and vitality. These and the profession then determine the character's fighting and spellcasting abilities.

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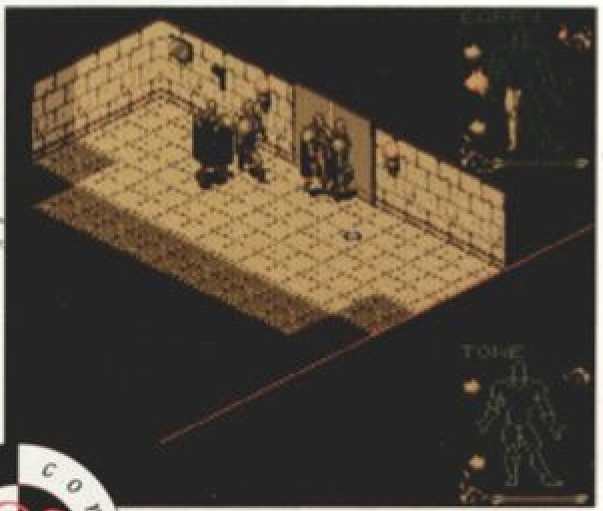
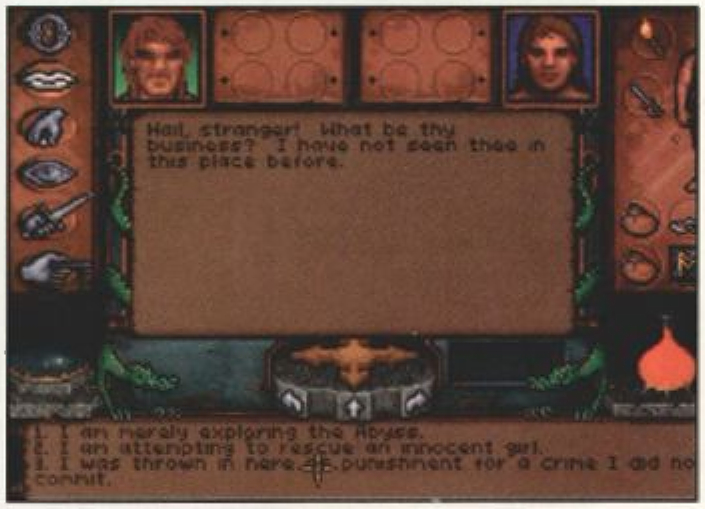
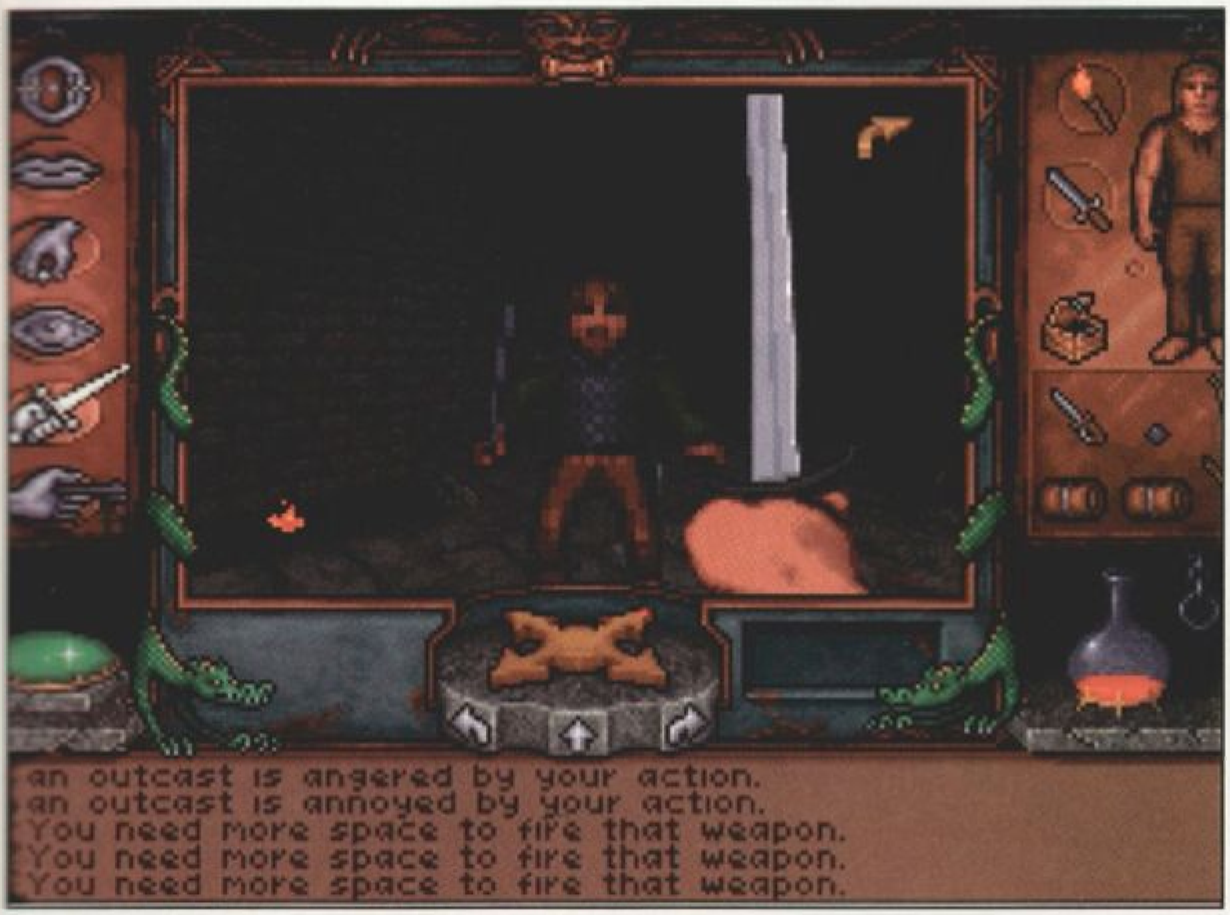


Sorry, Shadowlands. I'm afraid you've got to lose your Benchmark status, and after only one month at the top too. Ultima Underworld just blows you clean out of the water. Although lacking Shadowlands' unique multiple-character control, Underworld scores higher in almost every other department. After all, this is the nearest anyone could get to going down a medieval dungeon without wearing a cast-iron codpiece and doing it for real. A masterpiece.



Hail, stranger! What be thy business? I have not seen thee in this place before.

1. I am merely exploring the Abyss.
2. I am attempting to rescue an innocent girl.
3. I was thrown in here as punishment for a crime I did no
commit.



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an outcast is angered by your action.
an outcast is annoyed by your action.
You need more space to fire that weapon.
You need more space to fire that weapon.
You need more space to fire that weapon.
```

Nothing really prepares you for your first experience of the Underworld environment. It's the next true evolutionary step in the RPG genre and as much a technical advance on FTL's Dungeon Master as that game was on the top-viewed efforts that existed before. You can bet your Elven boots that you'll be seeing a lot of Underworld clones in the next few months or so. Well, PC owners will anyway. There's some serious number-crunching going on beneath Underworld's attractive exterior, and I'm afraid that the poor old Amiga and Atari ST just can't keep up. Sorry.

Stunning is the only single adjective that completely sums up the whole Underworld experience. And what an experience it is.

Like Dungeon Master, the player views the game world in first-person 3D. But whereas FTL's game only allowed the player to walk forward in jarring ten-foot chunks and turn in abrupt right angles, Underworld is a far more realistic and truer 3D environment with the player able to walk and turn smoothly just about anywhere he wants. Not only that, but the floor rises and falls smoothly, there are ledges and shelves to clamber onto and deep chasms to leap across. It's even possible to go for a swim in the many pools and rivers that course through the labyrinths. It's all frighteningly realistic, and the feeling of 'being there' is enhanced by the motion effects, like the slow bob when player goes walkies and the swaying and dipping when in water.

There are four detail levels which allow the player to compromise between speed and detail to his heart's content. At the lowest detail level the reason for the incredible flexibility of the game world becomes apparent; everything is modelled in polygons overlaid with texture maps. The only time this is noticeable in the game is when the player moves right up close to a wall and looks at it obliquely - objects you'd expect to stick out from the wall's surface, like switches, lie flat on it because basically they are just drawings on a flat surface.

The dungeon's inhabitants are less impressive. They all move around and animate adequately as long as they don't get too close. When they do they begin to disappoint. There's a distinct blockyness to them, like the trackside objects you get in a Sega arcade racing game. Once you get used to seeing the effect it's not so bad, but it does detract from the dense atmosphere a bit.

Walk, run, jump and swim - just about anything you can do in the 'real' world you can do in

▶40

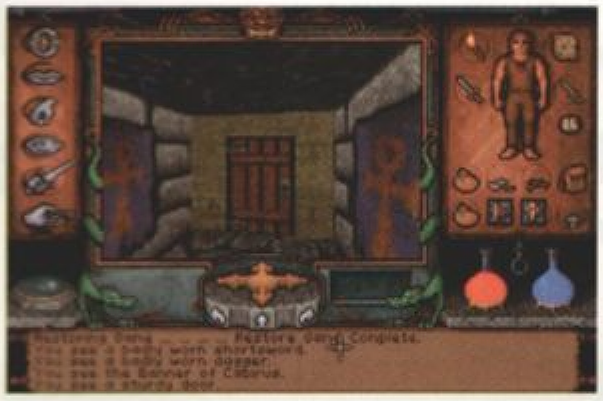
ULTIMA UNDERWORLD

IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE...?

The creatures waiting to be met in the Underworld are a nasty lot. Smelly, slimy, villainous, treacherous and downright unlikeable, they'd sooner stick a knife in your back than give you any help.

But there are some decent types down there in the catacombs. Keep an eye out for the Banner of Cabirus (shown right) painted on any doors - beyond you'll find fellow humans willing to lend a hand and offering food and comfort to the needy. They're a bit like the Salvation Army of the World of Britannia, except they don't try to raise funds for their cause by going around the local taverns desperately asking pissed revellers to buy copies of The Warcry.

Nothing you've ever seen before will prepare you for your first experience of the incredible Ultima Underworld. If it got any more real you'd have to undergo a medical examination to make sure your heart was capable of withstanding the rigours of the game! But to give you, the dear reader, some idea of the perils that lie ahead for would-be dungeon delvers, peruse these shabbily-arranged screenshots on this here spread.

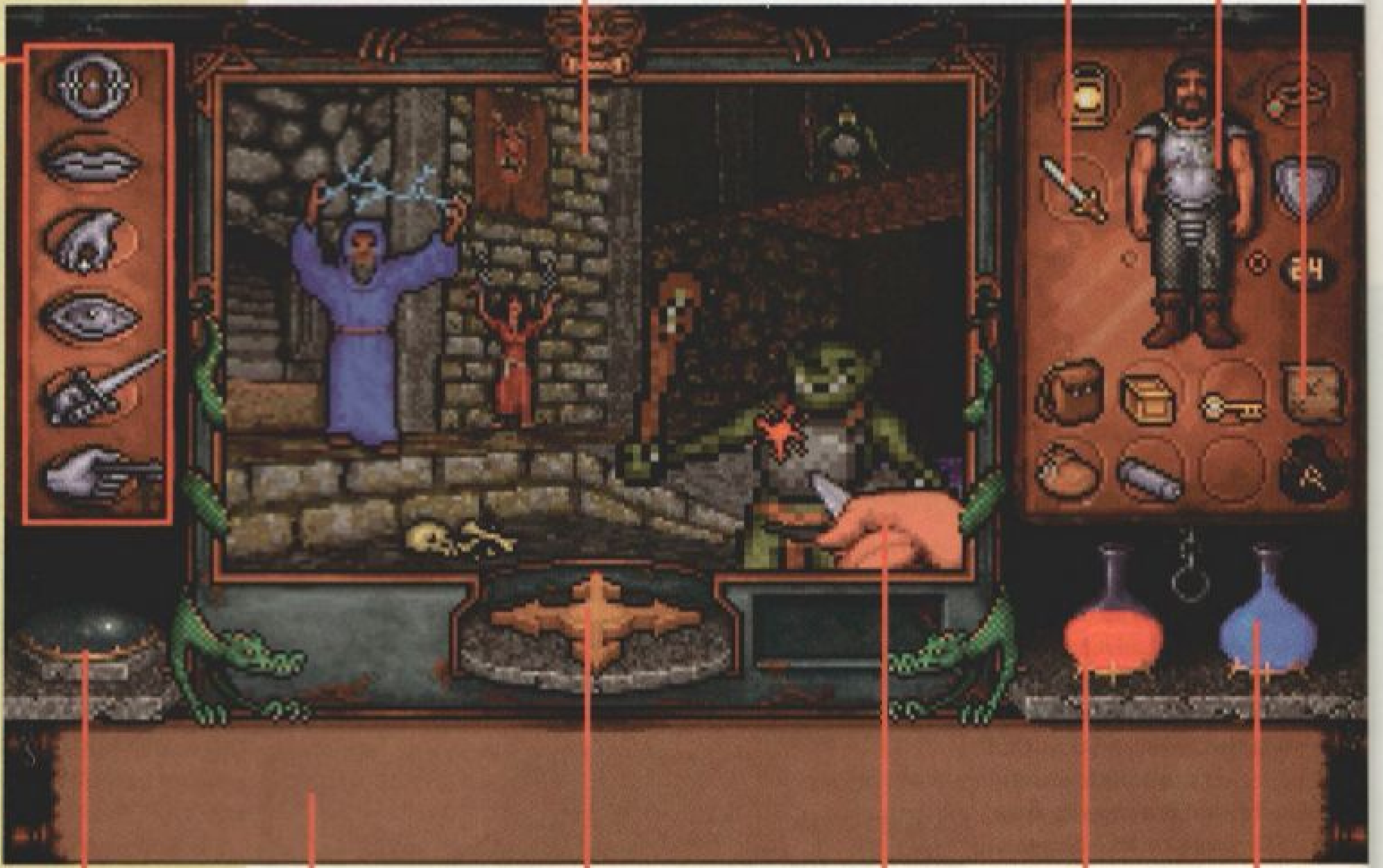


This is where you get your 3D first-person view on the whole Underworld. In this shot you can see the way that the dungeons are made up of sloping floors, ledges and walkways. Pretty amazing, isn't it?

This scrap of parchment bears all the map-making scrawls you've made on your travels. As well as showing all the corridors and rooms (which are drawn by the computer) you can add your own notes and messages.

This, believe it or not, is you. Good-looking fella, aren't you? When generating your character at the beginning of the game you're given a range of fizzogs to choose between - pick a better one than I did, per-lease.

Remember that if you've decided your character is right handed then you must drop any weapons to be used in the right-hand inventory slot. Put it anywhere else and it'll be useless. Bit of a tragedy when you're in battle, that.



(Top to bottom) The top icon accesses all the SAVE/LOAD options and allows you to do other things like alter the detail level and QUIT to DOS.

Select the second icon, the TALK icon, then click on a creature in the main window to have a chat!

Choose the next icon to make an easy PICK UP. Collected items can then be deposited in one of the onventory slots over the other side of screen.

The LOOK icon, third from bottom, lets you read notices and examine objects.

FIGHT! Click here and up pops your arm holding the weapon of your choice.

Ooh - you're just a USEr. This, the last icon, controls everything from pulling a wall switch to unlocking a door.

This is the STRIKE STRENGTH INDICATOR. When in Fight mode, the player tries to hit the vile enemy creatures by clicking on them and then holding the mouse button down. The longer the button is held down (indicated by this indicator changing from pearl to red to amber to green) the harder the blow. The trade-off is that the player can't get so many hits in.

The super-handy fine n' dandy COMPASS. The red tip always point to the North, and as if this wasn't enough to help you navigate around the dank mazes there's also a briliant auto-mapping facility. User friendly or what?

It's blank at the moment, but normally this is full of messages reporting such things as 'You have hit the troll' or 'The door is locked'.

Hey, hey, hey - that's *your* arm holding a sword and lashing out at the goblin!

This blue liquid represents th player's Mana level - if this is too low you'll not be able to cast the more powerful spell

The player's health is represented by this rapidly-diminishing bottle of red fluid (blood, presumably). Eating food, drinking special potions and resting restores valuable vitality.

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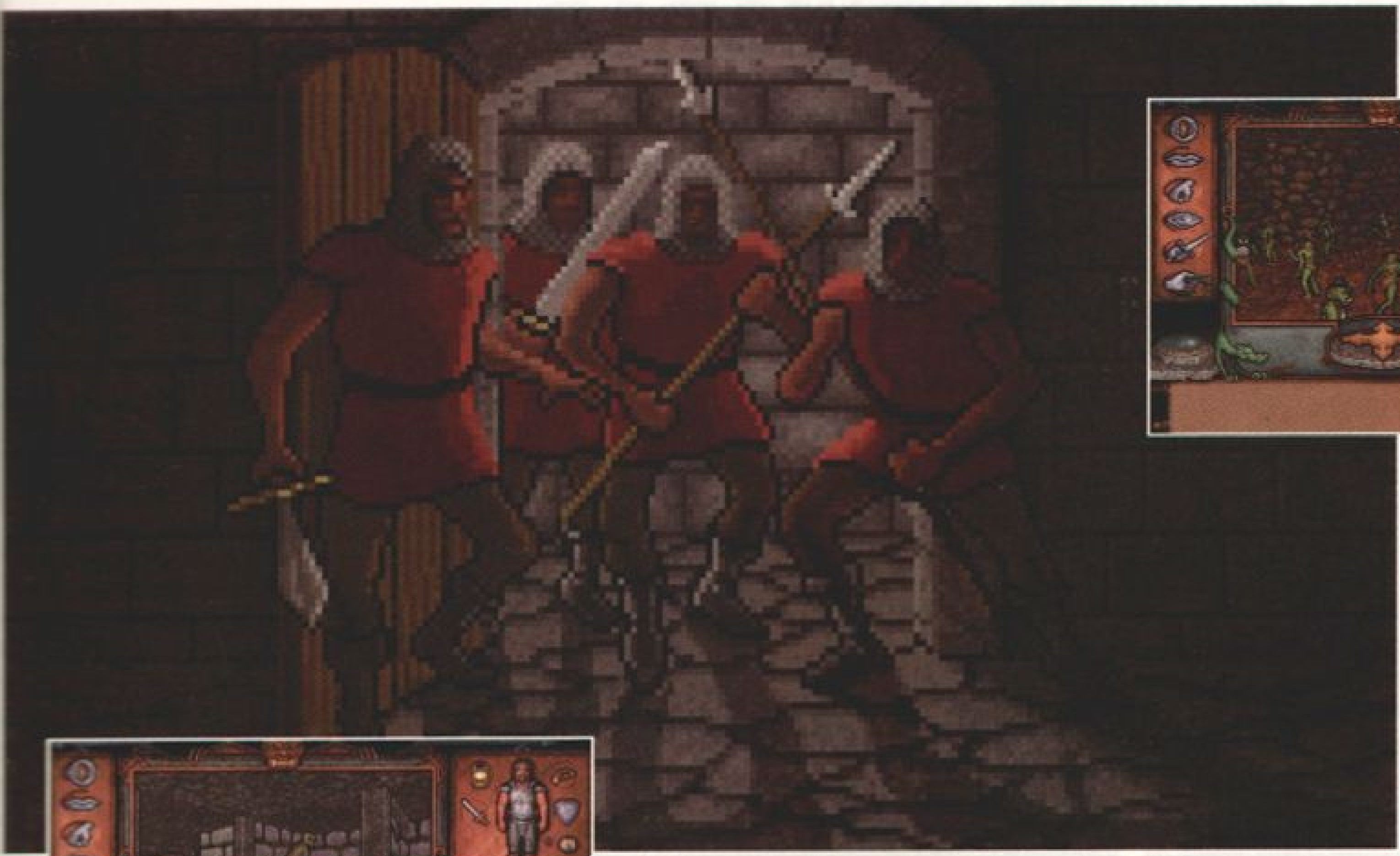
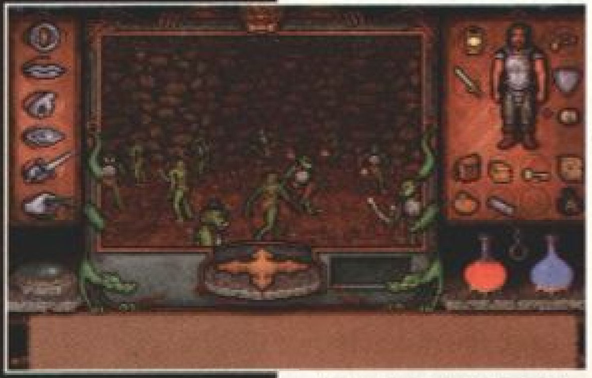
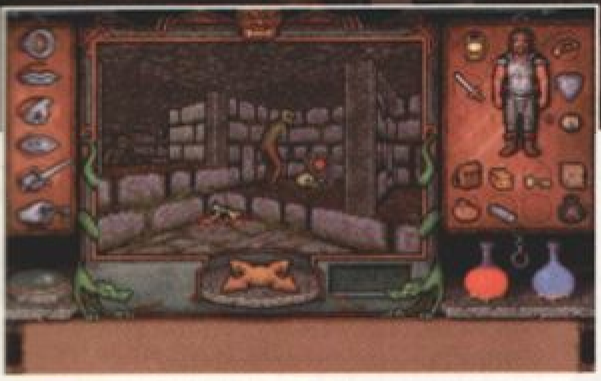
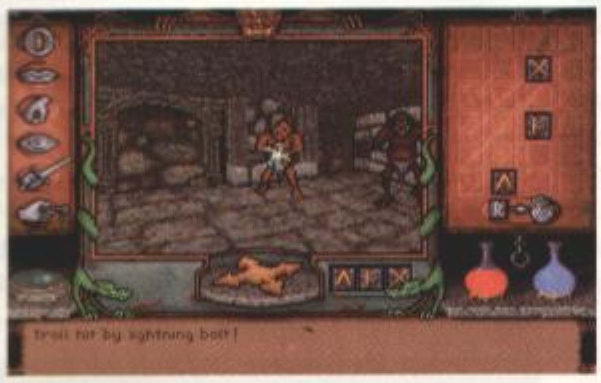




(Above) Look at 'em all! Some nifty sword work will be required to get out of this room alive. On the early levels monsters attack in manageable ones and twos, with the only group encounters being with friendly chaps. Later on and the above is typical of the hordes you're expected to wade through. But remember that not all problems have to be solved by violence...

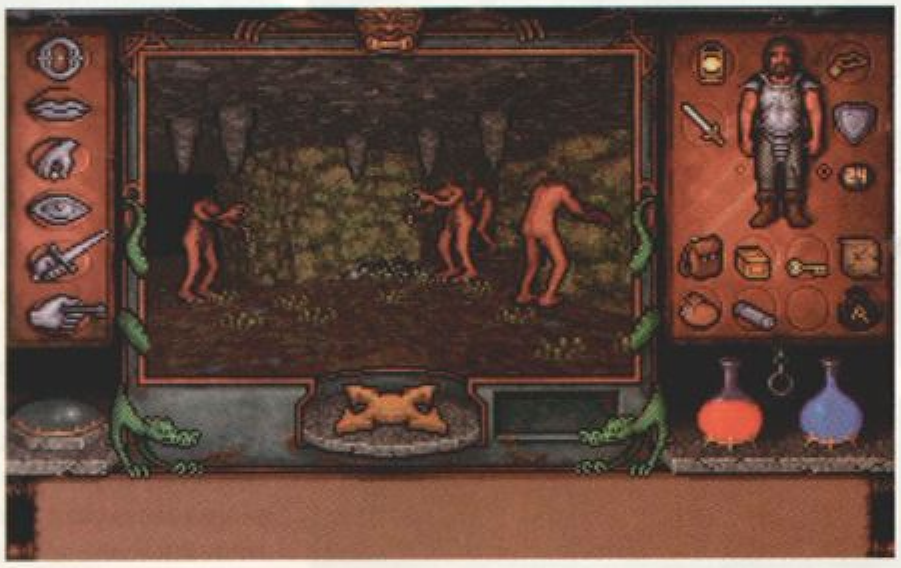


(Left) Just what *is* that creature doing in that small cubicle. Do you really want to know?



troll hit by lightning bolt!

(Left below) Thrackat-azooom! Some smart runestone-from-the-bag pulling looses off a mighty lightning bolt at one of the two slimy trolls.



(Right) This lot panic a lot in battle - they're always losing their heads! (Boom-boom!) If you want to get a hat, get a head...

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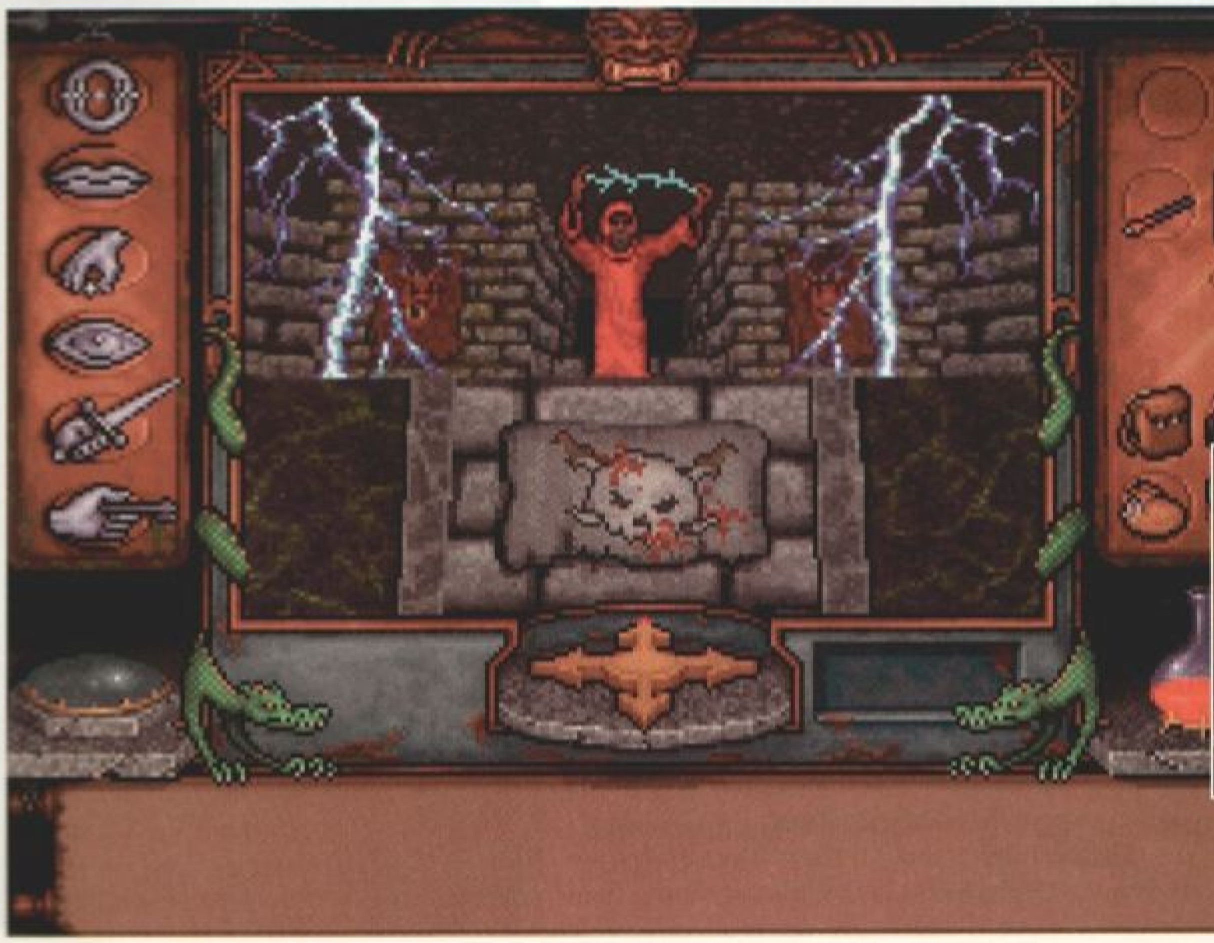
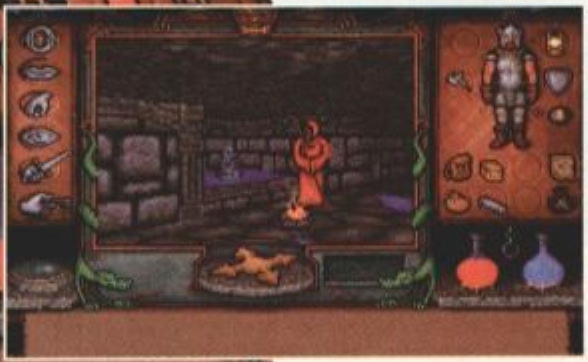


(Left) This red wizard is a particularly nasty opponent, able to cast all manner of flesh-withering, bone-cracking prestidigitations.



(Below) The red wizard crops up again. Some people just don't know when to give up, do they?

37▸ Underworld's fantasy realm. And you'd be forgiven for thinking that this wide-ranging implies a cumbersome control interface but you couldn't be more wrong. All player control is via mouse and/or keyboard, with the former providing the most fluid method.

The main game screen is dominated by a window showing the player's 3D view, to the left of which is a set of five action icons. Moving around is easy; the player moves the mouse pointer over the window and clicks. Depending where the pointer is located in the window, the player's character will walk forward, walk forward and to the left or right, step left or right, step back, jump or simply turn left or right.

Ultima Underworld is a real knock-you-down game. At first it is truly hard to believe that it's running on a standard home computer.

It's all very logical. If the pointer is at the top middle of the window then the player will walk forward and if it's at the bottom middle of the window then the player steps back. Get the idea? As a memory aid the pointer changes into a appropriate directional icon as it's moved about the window. Although initially it seems a bit confusing I was surprised at how quickly the control became instinctive and second nature.

You can probably guess the routine for using the action icons: click on an icon then click (using the second mouse button) on the object in the window. For the experienced player even greater ease-of-control is provided by the fact that making the icon selections can be short cut past via a variety of mouse-click combinations.

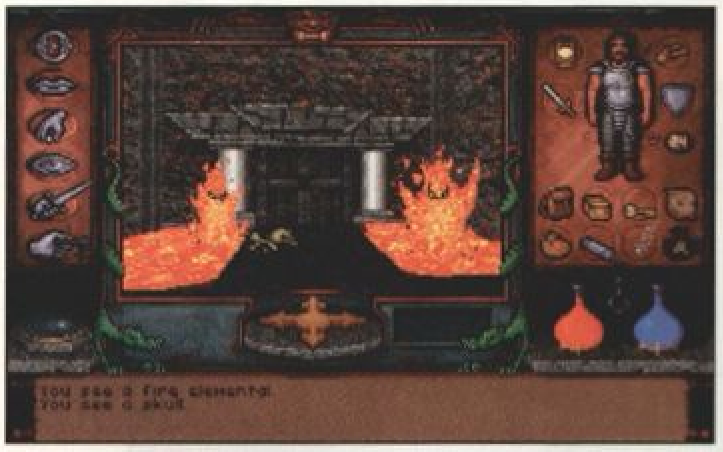
Most of the icons are pretty straight-forward and self-explanatory. 'Look' allows the player to examine the weirder objects found lying on the corridor floors and read any messages scratched into the stone walls. 'Pick up' allows the player to add newly-discovered items to his inventory and 'Use' lets him... er... use them in a manner appropriate the context of the situation. Thus, if the player has a key then it can be clicked on a locked door to try and open it; 'use'ing it anywhere else is unlikely to produce any result.

More interesting is the 'Fight' icon. When clicked upon the player's currently-held weapon appears in the bottom of the world window, as if the player were really holding it. If the player is weaponless, then a fist appears. Holding down the second mouse button starts to build up the strike's power, indicated by a glowing pad changing from green to amber to red. It's up to the player to decide whether he wants to opt for lots of quick but relatively-weak blows or slower but highly-powerful smashes. Depending on where the player located the mouse pointer in the game window a variety of moves can be executed, from simple jabs to violent slashes. There's never been a more authentic or exciting simulation of man-to-man fighting on computer.

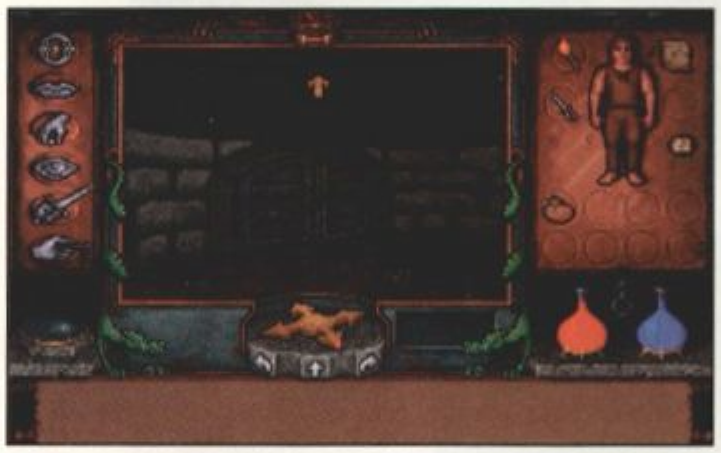
Spellcasting is performed in a way familiar to experienced Ultima fans, except instead of using natural spell components (which are a bit hard to come across in a dungeon) each spell is cast by pulling magically-inscribed runestones from a special bag in the correct order. The difficult bit, of course, is finding the runestones. Over forty spells are possible, allowing the player to do anything from summoning an earthquake to casting a lightning bolt to making the player's character fly.

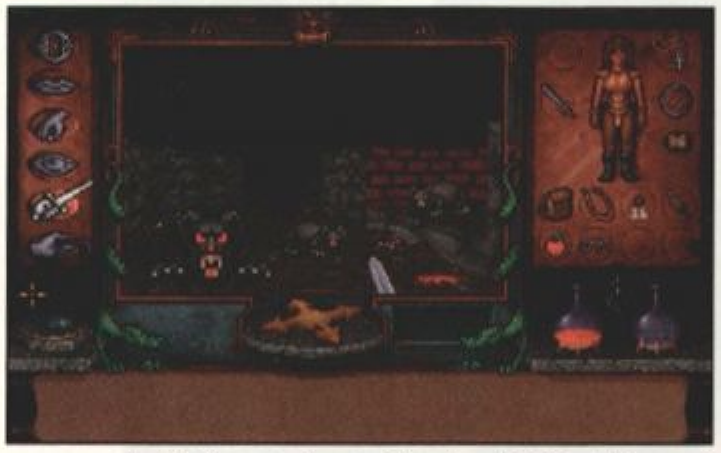
But, as soon becomes apparent, chatting in the Underworld is just as important, if not more so, than out-and-out hacking. Via the 'Talk' icon the player can try and engage in conversation with any of the dungeon's denizens providing that they're willing. This takes the form of a multiple-choice reply to the computer-controlled characters statements, which although limited by it's very nature is more than adequate. It's also possible to trade with the characters met, which is vital in some cases to complete the mini-quests that crop up from time to time.

The best thing about the creatures that populate the Underworld is that they are more than



You see a fire elemental
You see a skull





(Top) Goodness gracious great fire elementals! Ah well, if you can't stand the heat get outta the dungeon.
(Above middle) You can't even go for a nice refreshing swim without having to worry about lurkers in the depths - they somewhat more dangerous than an old bicycle frame!
(Above) Rats! These vermin are the least threatening of the entities to be found in the Abyss's cavernous depths, but that doesn't mean you should become complacent about seeing them off.

PC Version

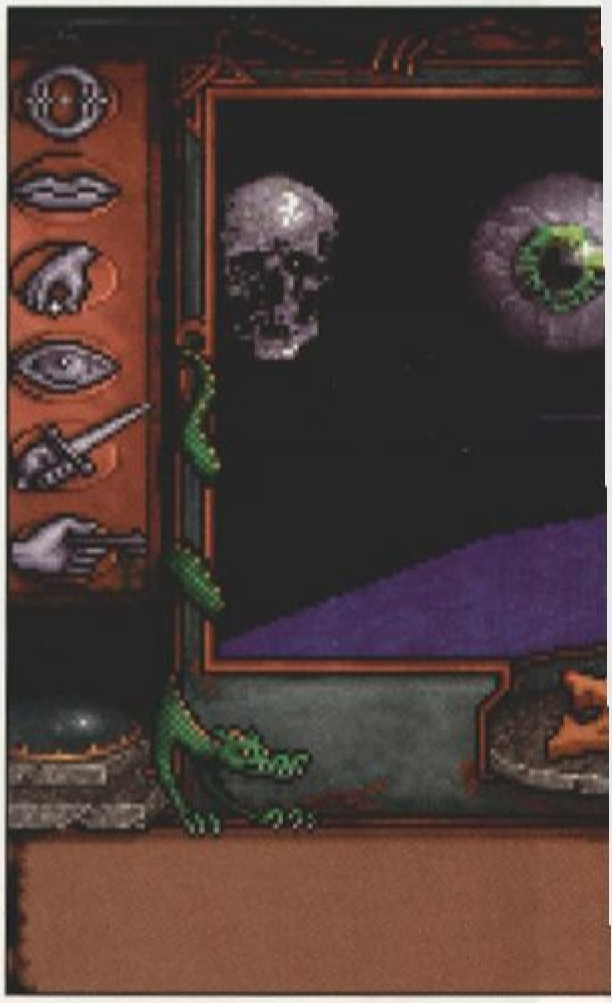
A game as complex as this doesn't come cheap - at least, not as far as your hardware is concerned. Underworld is strictly a 256-colour VGA game only and Origin recommend a 386 PC or better to get the best out of it (although I found the game worked more than adequately on a 20MHz 286). The more soundboards you've got the better (Roland for music in tandem with a Soundblaster for speech is the ideal combination - but you could've probably guessed that for yourself). Surprisingly Underworld comes on just four floppies and takes up just ** Mb of your valuable hard drive space. Who says big things don't come in small packages anymore?

Amiga Version

Thanks to a special blitter trick discovered by Origin's top programmers we're promised a faster screen update, 4096 colours on-screen and 12-channel sound, including full speech throughout the game. And to celebrate the release Origin are arranging a special tour or Britain by their trained fleet of areonautical pigs. Expect to see Amiga Underworld on the shelves and you're hopelessly optimistic.

ST Version

When Atari launch an ST with a 20MHz 68000 processor, 256 colours, synthesiser-quality sound and a built-in hard drive then maybe, just maybe, you can expect to see Underworld on your machine. But until that happy day arrives the chances are slimmer than Twiggy's thigh.



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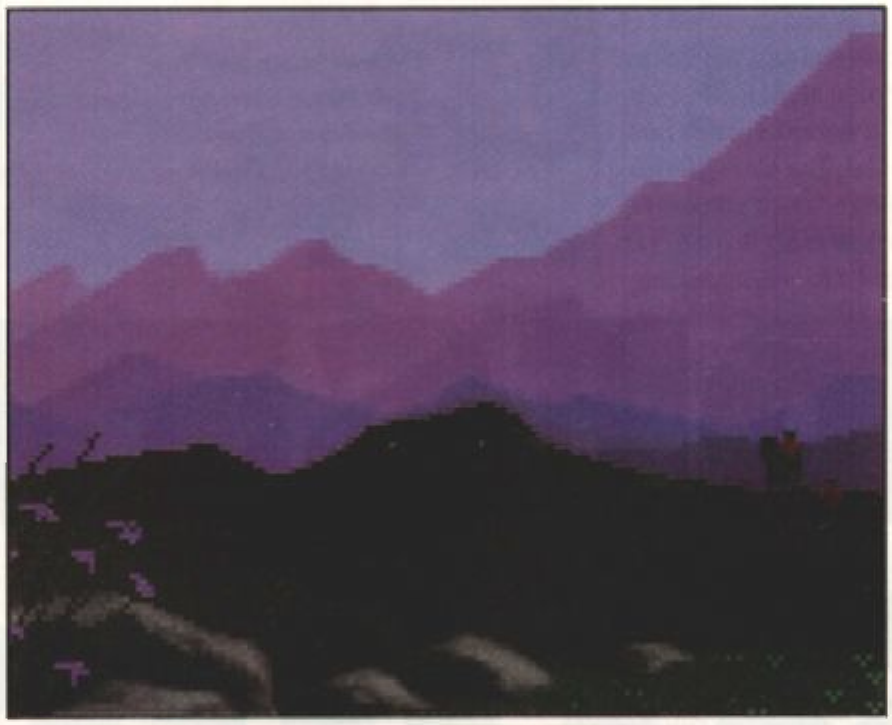


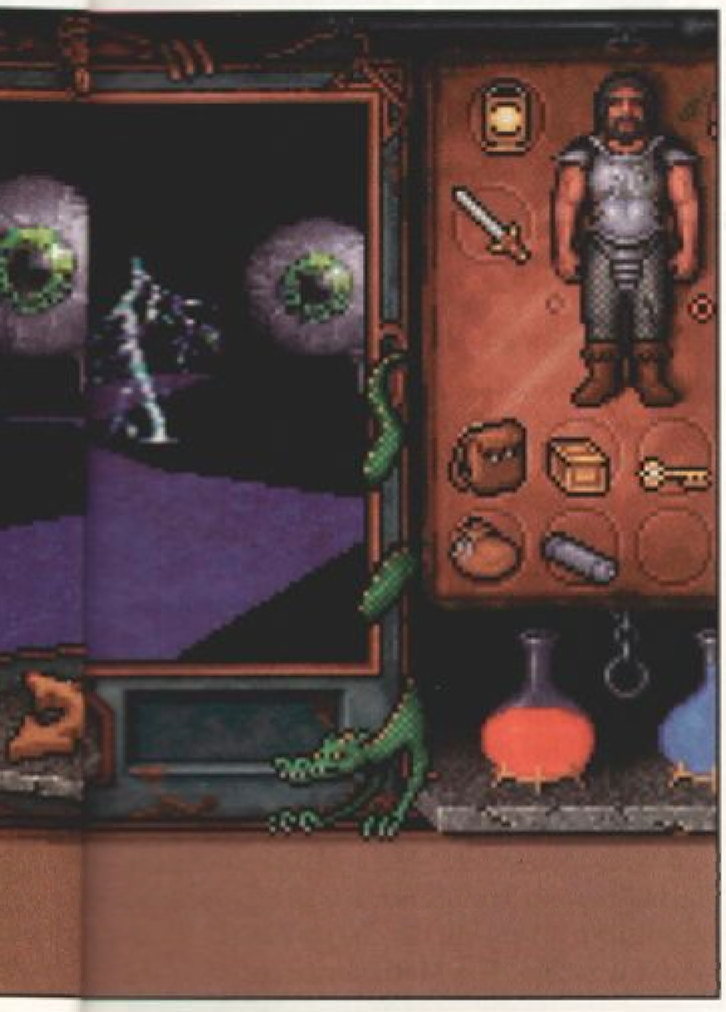
(Top, above and left) A selection of scenes from the lengthy intro. Never mind the graphics, listen to the speech - it's (unintentionally) hilarious.

moderately intelligent. They'll respond to your actions intelligently, so if you make friends with something but try to steal its food then it'll respond in the same way you would, i.e. with a swift sock to the jaw. Likewise in combat, creatures won't just stand in front of you trading blows until either they or the player are dead. If its all going badly they may well back off to recover or try a different strategy.

Underworld is a big, big game. It consists of eight huge levels, each with a number of smaller sub-levels leading off from them. Unsurprisingly, it's easy to get lost and making a map is a necessity. Now I for one hate trying to play a game while balancing a piece of graph paper on my knee at the same time, but Underworld's designers have made this sort of shenanigan a thing of the past. The game features an automatic mapping facility, leaving you to get on with the fun of exploring. Even better, you can write notes on the map so you'll never forget where that huge pile of gold was. If only all RPGs provided a similar handy utility.

Ultima Underworld is a real knock-you-down game. At first it is truly hard to believe that it's running on a standard home computer. It's not only great to look at, but it also plays superbly and has enough depth to keep even the most experienced dungeon-delving veteran going for months, if not years. If you've got a PC, then you've got to have Ultima Underworld.

● **David Upchurch**



GIVE ME MORE DETAILS!

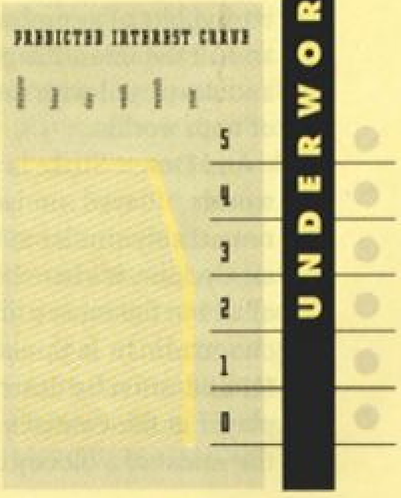
Ultima Underworld boasts four detail levels to choose between. At the highest detail level you get the full works - walls, floors and ceilings all lovingly detailed. Go down one detail level and you lose the coarse stone ceiling - it's replaced by a graduated grey flat surface. Go down one more detail level and you lose the stone-floor effects, again to be replaced by simple polygons. At the lowest detail level there's no texture mapping at all - all the dungeon corridors are depicted in polygons. Boo! At least that means owners of fairly under-powered machines can enjoy some of the experience.

RATINGS

Out-of-this-(under)world graphics! Brilliant control interface. Superb blend of bashing and brain-bending	Sound effects, though atmospheric, are limited.

938 . . RATING

Underworld grips right from the start. The old 'wrongly-accused hero tries to prove his innocence' scenario may be older than George Burns but it's a tried-and-trusted way of getting the player involved. The control system is a marvel, allowing the player to perform almost any action you could imagine in the 'real' world easily and quickly. Although the first level is perhaps a little too slowly paced, things do hot up very quickly. Eight levels may not sound like much, but each is huge to say the least (Origin estimate there are around 24 miles of corridor to explore in all). Once you get your hands on Underworld it's likely that you'll not be coming up for air for a long, long time.



Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer In House
Release £34.99 March

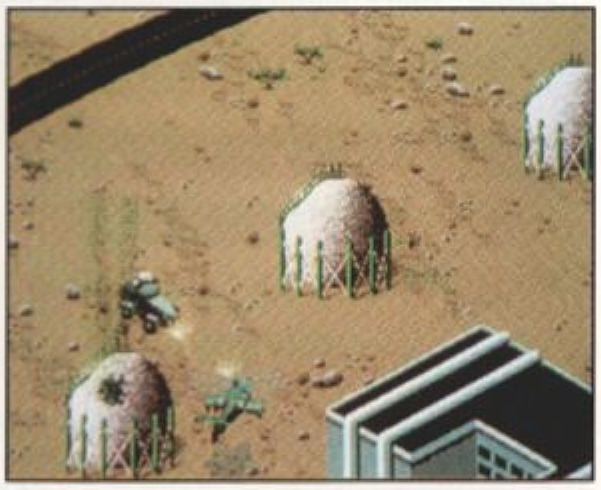
DESERT STRIKE

Return to the Gulf

There's something very sexy about helicopters. Maybe it's the ominous thudding of the rotor blades. Maybe it's their mosquito-like manoeuvrability. Or maybe it's the incredible destructive force that one of these miracles of flight technology can deliver. And no medium is more capable of displaying a chopper's awesome abilities than that of the video game.

Helicopter games don't have the player scrolling inexorably up the screen and missing all their targets like aeroplane games. And they don't have the player trudging across acres of dreary wasteland on foot in search of combat. Instead, all the boring bits of a combat zone can be flown across and all the interesting areas can be hovered over and destroyed with great precision. It's the best of both worlds.

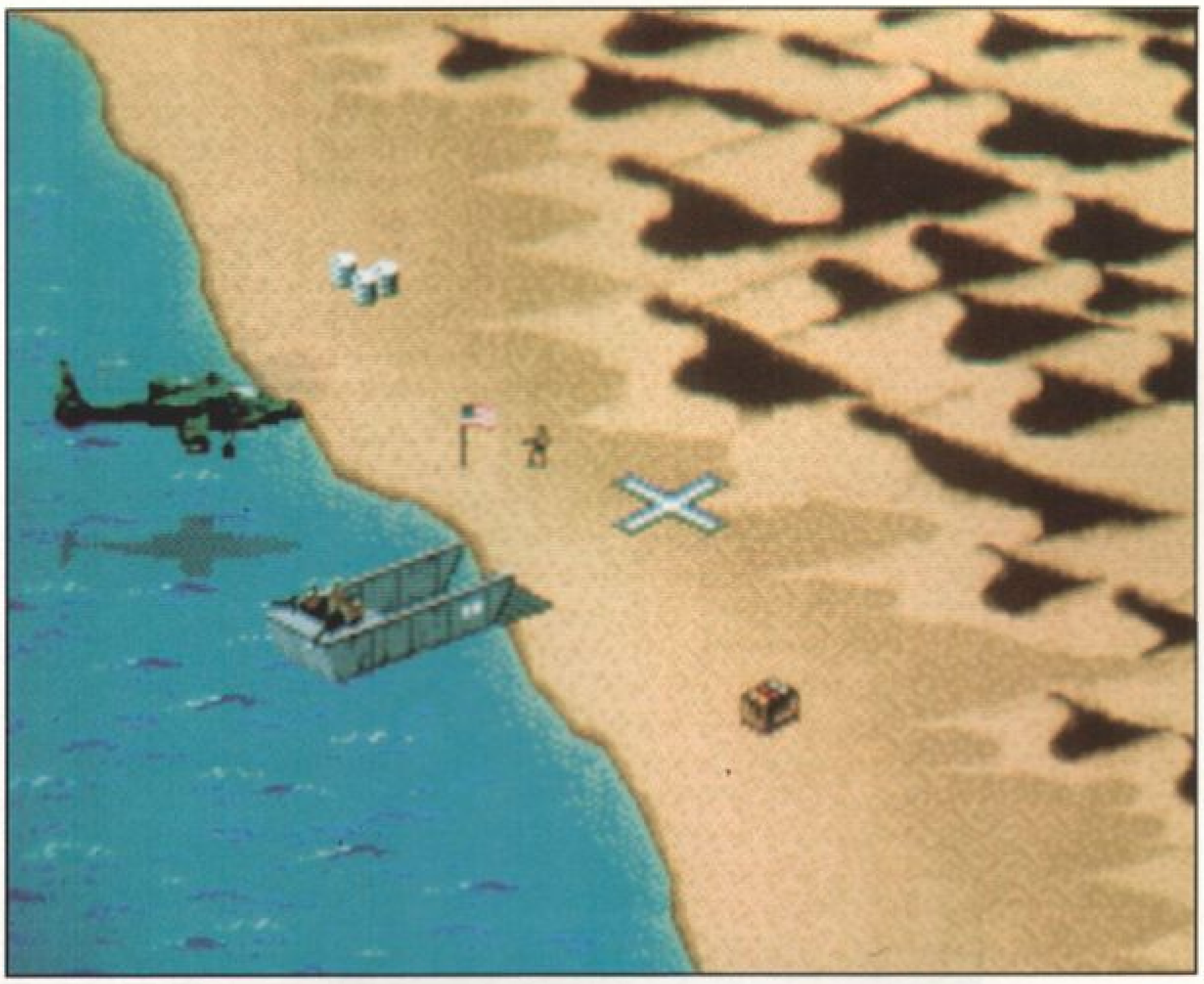
And Desert Strike is the best of the best of both worlds. Played in isometric 3D and looking remarkably similar to the age-old Spectrum classic Cyclone, it's bare-bones combat frenzy. Bereft of all but the most rudimentary storyline ("a psycho madman is threatening to start World War III and must be destroyed") the game puts the player at the controls of a combat helicopter in the midst of a bloody conflict in the Gulf.

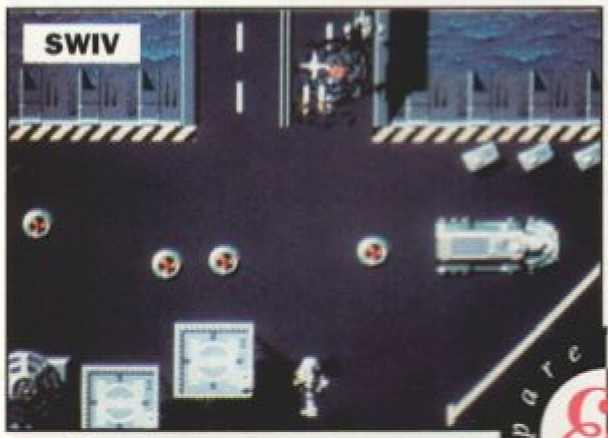


It's been a long time since the balance between arcade action and some bearable strategy has been struck so well. Desert Strike forces the player to think all the time while never making him wait too long before the next chance to get into a top class firefight.

Following the briefing comes an opportunity for the player to select his co-pilot for the mission. Here we have the run of the mill data sheet for each potential co-pilot, revealing the personality defects in each. Some are experts with the winch (more of that later) at the expense of being a useless gunner. Others love to stick it to the enemy but will show little remorse after offing friendly troops. Once the most rounded man for the mission in hand has been selected, the control method can be determined.

There are three available, Cockpit, From Above and With Momentum. The cockpit view rotates the helicopter about its horizontal axis, with up on the joypad moving the chopper in the direction it is facing. The Momentum option is the





SWIV is still the ACE arcade-blast benchmark, simply because it is so utterly, completely and totally polished, but Desert Strike comes close on a number of scores. The balance between blasting and some low-level strategy is a big plus, as is the rather smart co-pilot set up. However, Desert Strike is let down somewhat by the occasionally scratchy graphics and s.l.o.w.i.n.g d.o.w.n. problems which crop up with multiple sprites.

same except the helicopter has, well, momentum and so feels very realistic but is impossible to fly accurately in tight situations. By far the best option is From Above, which is the least like flying a real helicopter but is the easiest and most fun. Here, the chopper simply goes in the direction the player points the joypad.

Launching from the carrier patrolling just off the sandy coast, the player glides almost silently (save for the thwupping rotor blades) across the azure sea in a most atmospheric opening to each mission. A single bleep signifies the arming of weapons and offers a good chance for the pilot to examine his on-board map and plan the attack.

Even on the first mission, the level of enemy resistance encountered can hardly be described as slight. It's here that the player learns the rudiments of combat and has a chance to get to grips with co-operating with his co-pilot. The helicopter is equipped with neither an unlimited supply of ammunition or fuel. So the pilot will need to learn to spot tell-tale signs in the landscape as to where fuel barrels and crates of extra ammo may be hidden. Normally this isn't as difficult as it sounds and allied intelligence will be able to point the way to sufficient supplies to prevent the player having to steal those belonging to the enemy, although it's quite satisfying to do so.

As well as wreaking as much havoc as possible among the enemy troops, it's the job of the co-pilot to operate the winch to pull aboard goodies such as these (along with extra armour and medi-packs) as well as friendly MIAs and enemy top-brass ripe for interrogation.

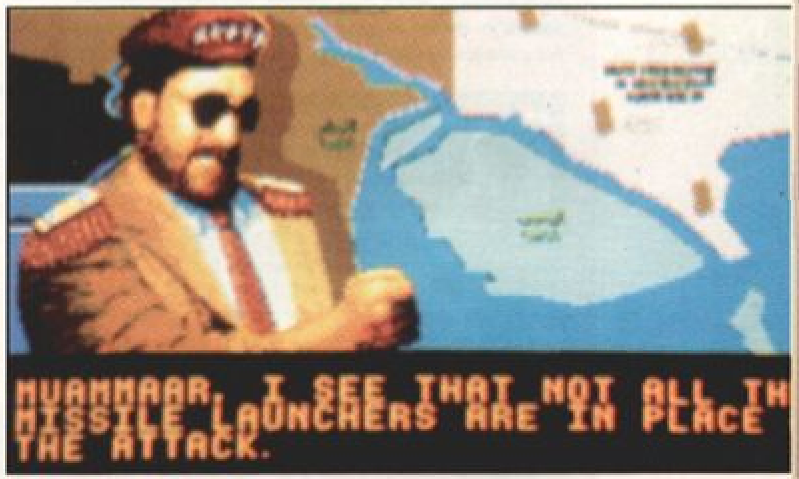
The player is forced to think all the time while never having to wait too long before getting into a good fire-fight.

The nerve and skill of the co-pilot will directly affect the player's success in combat, since once the helicopter is pointing in a particular direction and the fire button is held, the co-pilot's artificial intelligence will select a target to plug away at. Providing that the co-pilot is of a reasonable quality, he will prioritise and shoot at the most dangerous target; in a heated firefight, it's a definite disadvantage to be saddled with a gunner who would rather shoot at a soldier armed with a carbine than take out a rocket launcher capable of inflicting massive damage.

Of course, the player can determine which weapons are actually being fired, using the buttons to cycle through cannon, hellfire and hydra missiles, but it's the co-pilot's accuracy that counts.

Once the co-pilot has locked on to a target, holding down the fire button will enable the player to dodge enemy fire while still blasting away. Unnecessarily heroic gamers can thus save their valuable missile reserves by giving themselves longer to machine-gun targets by dodging the incoming fire.

Even during the most basic encounters with enemy troops, the player can have a right old laugh. Learning how to get the most out of the helicopter's abilities is almost as satisfying as blowing things up. And in moments of frustration when it becomes clear that the mission in hand just can't be completed for one reason or another, there's nothing quite as amusing as loosing a vengeful burst of hellfire rockets upon a single enemy git.



MUAMMAR, I SEE THAT NOT ALL TH
MISSILE LAUNCHERS ARE IN PLACE
THE ATTACK.

My God, this man means business! He didn't get those stars on his cap for nothing, you know. With his twisted fevered mind intent on destroying the entire planet and delivering us all to Allah, the only decent thing to do is send a helicopter gunship to destroy his evil empire. But have you the balls for the job?

Distinguishing Desert Strike from many mission-driven shoot-'em-ups is the structure of the campaign itself. While many similar games will send the player off to take some photos or deliver some food supplies to a remote village, Desert Strike's missions manage to be continually varied while still revolving around the basic principal of destroying everything. Blow Up the enemy radar installations. Blow Up the bio-weapons factory. Blow Up the power stations. Blow Up the POW camp.

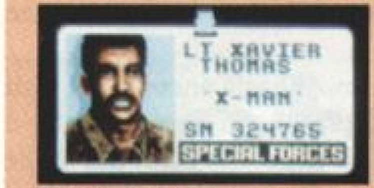
▶46

DESERT STRIKE

WANTED: Unattached professional (n/s) for short-term holiday work in sunny climes. Air-sickness a disadvantage.

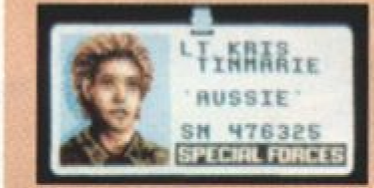
Lone-wolf solo mavericks need not apply for duties in this Gulf scenario. These missions are definitely a team thing. The best chopper jockey in the world isn't going to get very far in a hostile situation without a solid, reliable co-pilot to watch his back and take care of the guns and winch.

But who's the best person for each mission? Who can keep their head in a tight situation, and who will crack and degenerate into a stupid gibbering jelly? It's very much a matter of guesswork. Or at least it WAS, but now, thanks to the ACE Combat Dating Agency, we can shortlist the following entrants who are just dying to take a trip with you.



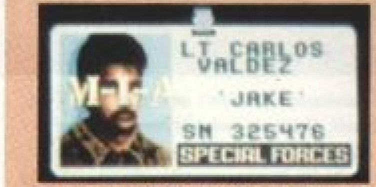
LT XAVIER THOMAS
'X-MAN'
SM 324765
SPECIAL FORCES

X-Man is great on missions with little hostile fire, but a bit of a brown-trouser merchant when the going gets tough. He's a speedy winch man, though, and will quickly yank aboard all the extra armour you'll need to compensate for his diabolical marksmanship.



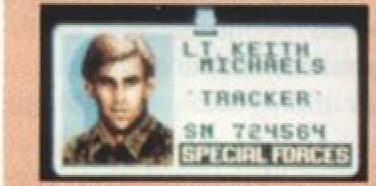
LT KRIS TIMMARIE
'AUSSIE'
SM 476325
SPECIAL FORCES

You know what they say about girls who ride horses. Apparently, agent Timmarie's experience of riding big horses in Australia has given her nerves of steel and a good arm on the winch to boot. How do they make this stuff up?



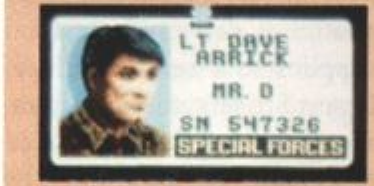
LT CARLOS VALDEZ
'JAKE'
SM 325476
SPECIAL FORCES

Valdez may look like Charlie Sheen on a bad day, but he's a top gunner and wincher. Alas, he's missing in action, so unless you can be bothered to scour the barren wasteland in the hope of finding him, his skills won't be at your disposal.



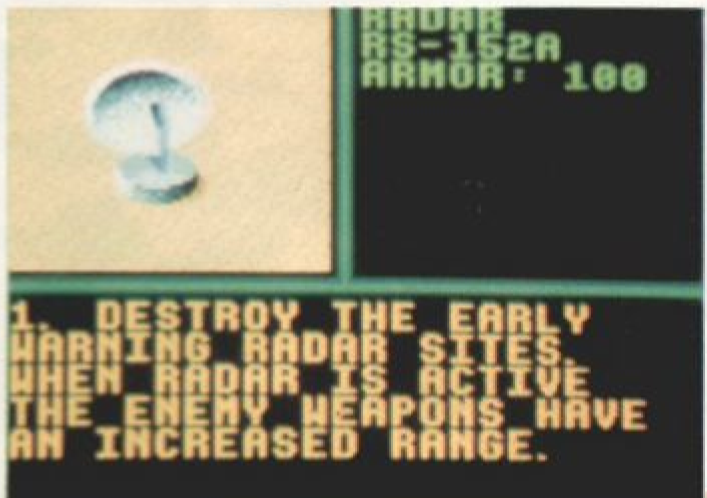
LT KEITH MICHAELS
'TRACKER'
SM 724564
SPECIAL FORCES

Forget the fact that Michaels is worryingly similar in the facial department to a young Kevin Costner in Sizzle Beach, beacuse he's the most tip-top bloke to have as a co-pilot. Forget the sleazy git with the 'tache and the stupid girlie - Michaels sorts it all out in style.



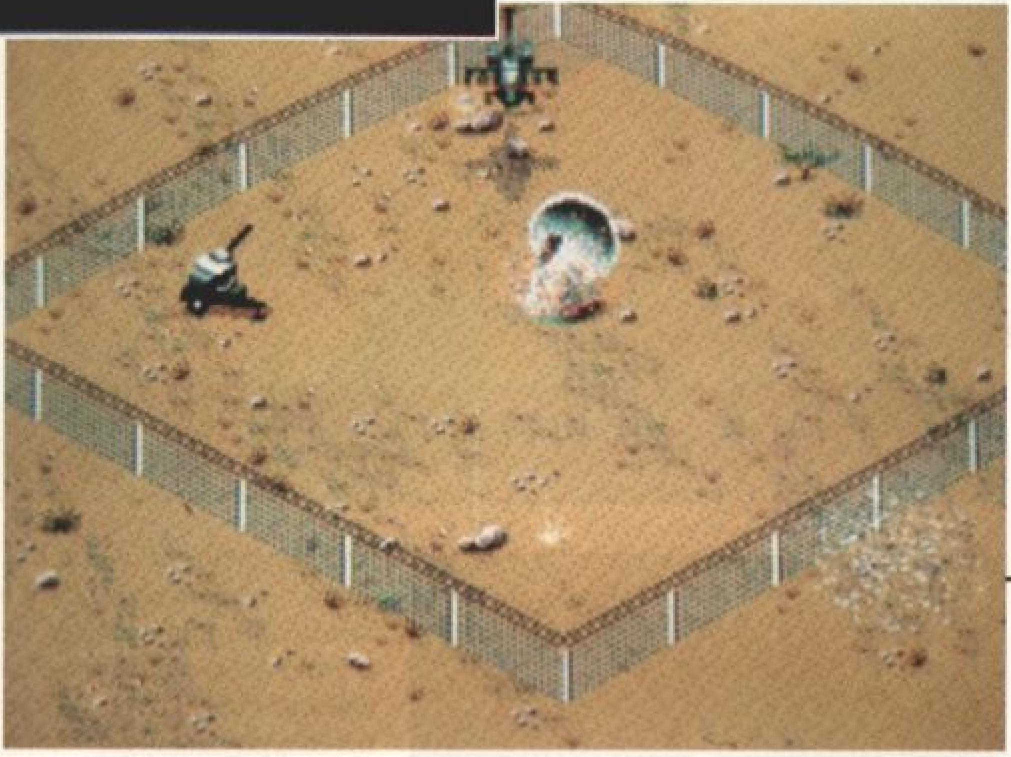
LT DAVE ARRICK
MR. D
SM 547326
SPECIAL FORCES

Is he brave or is he bonkers? He's BOTH! Mr D is a crazy mellonfarmer and no mistake. He jams the winch and shoots civilians, but he's such a no-prisoners hero that it really doesn't matter. Take him on early missions just for a laugh!



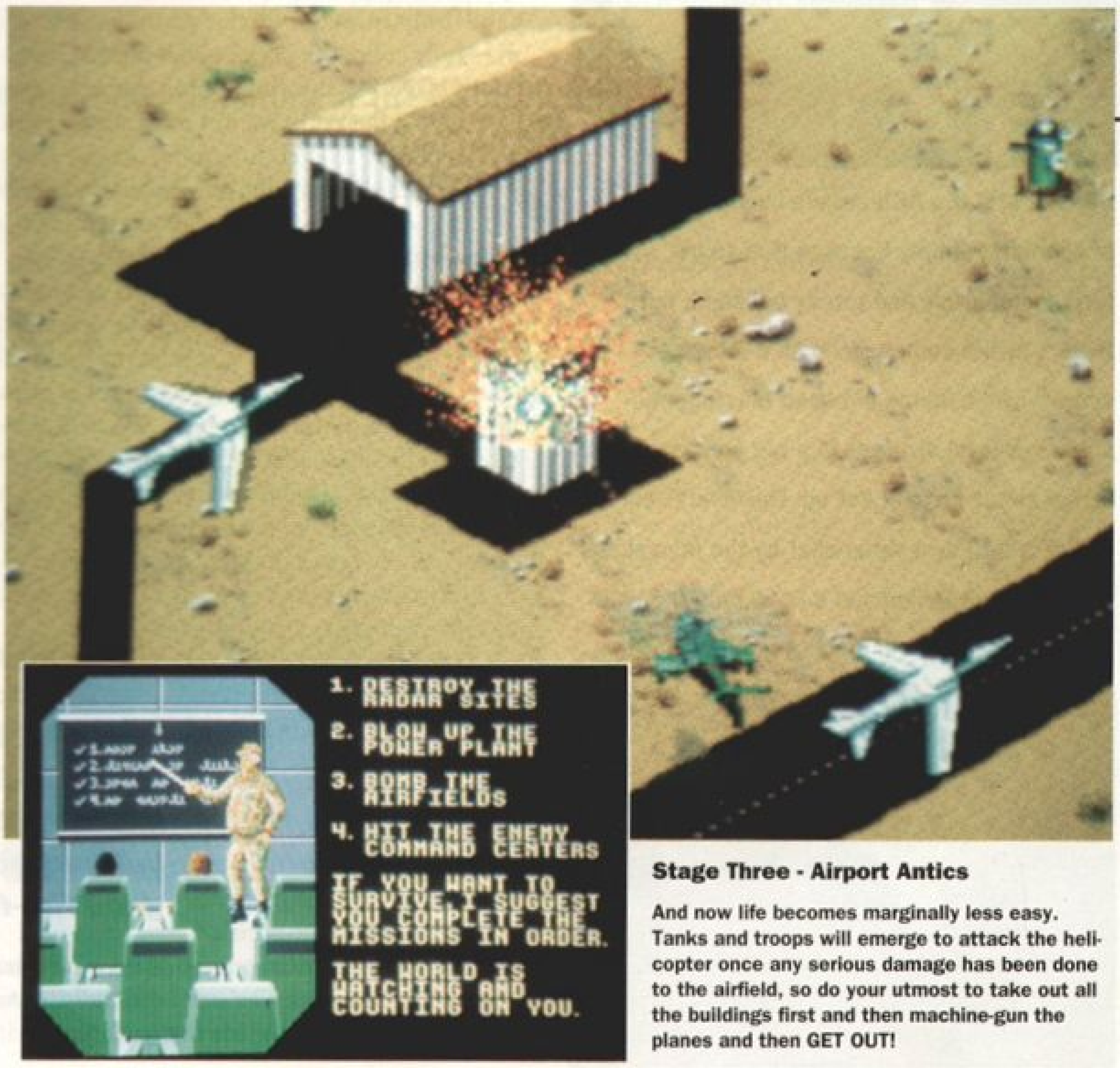
RADAR
RS-152A
ARMOR: 100

1. DESTROY THE EARLY WARNING RADAR SITES. WHEN RADAR IS ACTIVE THE ENEMY WEAPONS HAVE AN INCREASED RANGE.



Stage One - Radar Romps

These targets are a soft as runny eggs! Here some weedy radar dishes get what they deserve. If you're fortunate enough to have a good co-pilot, they will prioritise the targets and shoot out the gun before the non-threatening radar dish.



1. DESTROY THE RADAR SITES
2. BLOW UP THE POWER PLANT
3. BOMB THE AIRFIELDS
4. HIT THE ENEMY COMMAND CENTERS

IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE, I SUGGEST YOU COMPLETE THE MISSIONS IN ORDER.

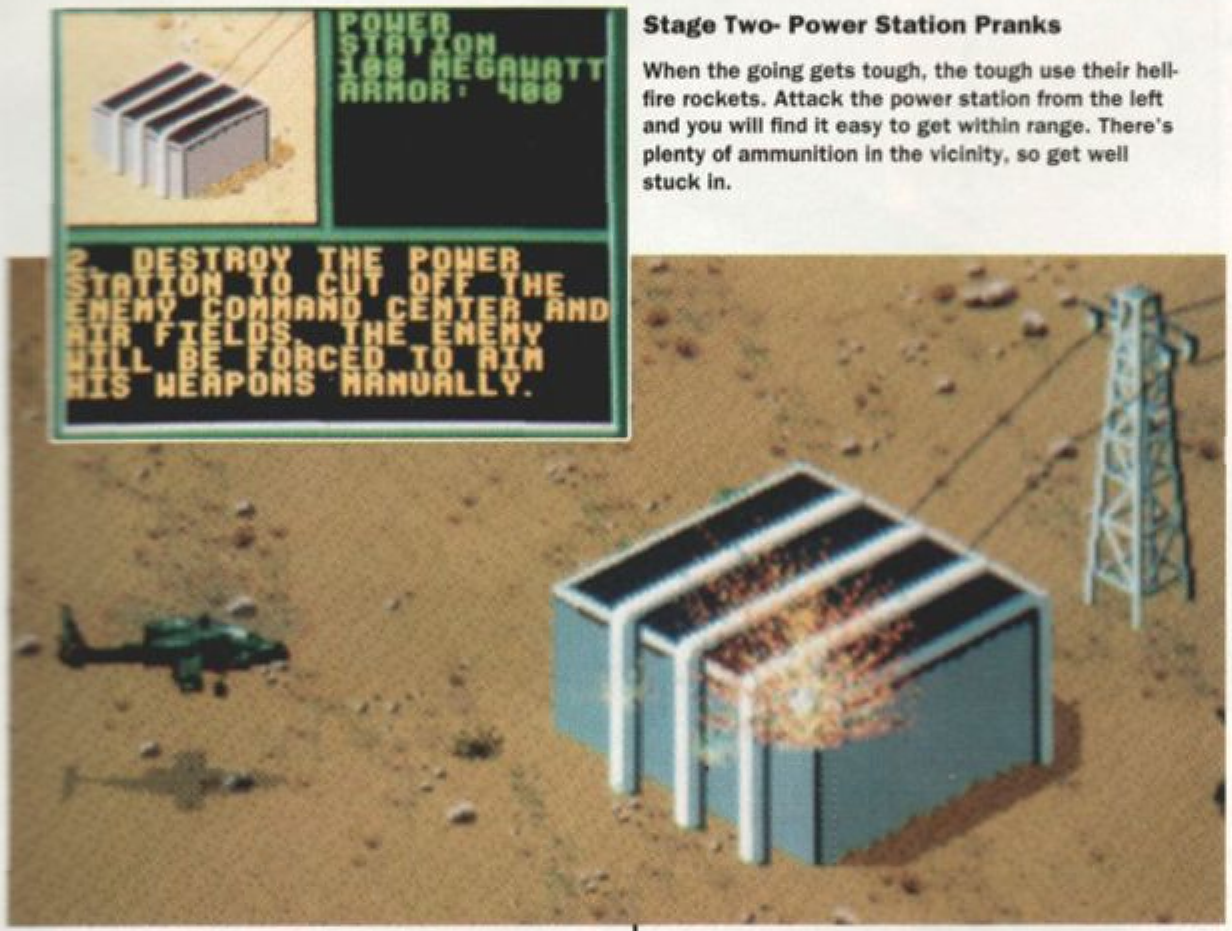
THE WORLD IS WATCHING AND COUNTING ON YOU.

Stage Three - Airport Antics

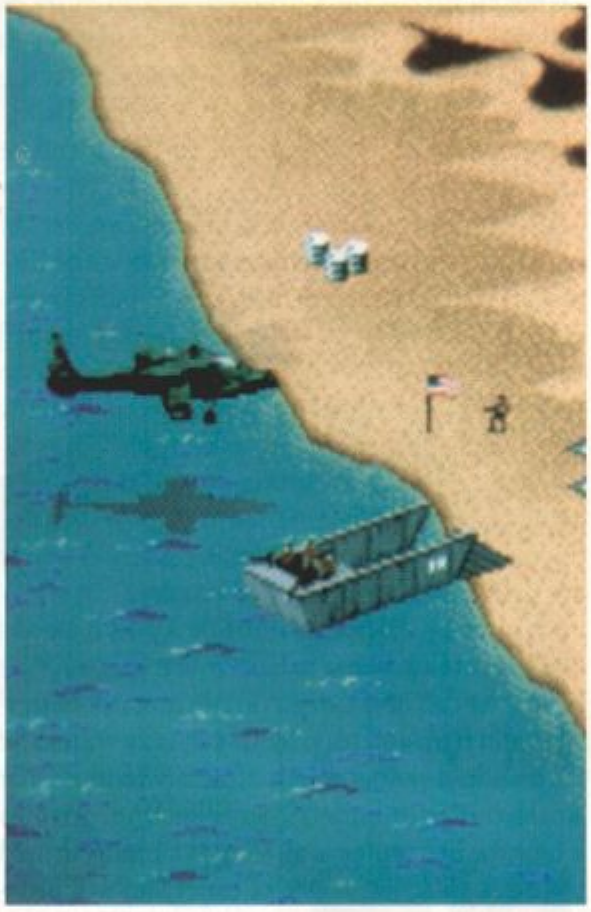
And now life becomes marginally less easy. Tanks and troops will emerge to attack the helicopter once any serious damage has been done to the airfield, so do your utmost to take out all the buildings first and then machine-gun the planes and then GET OUT!

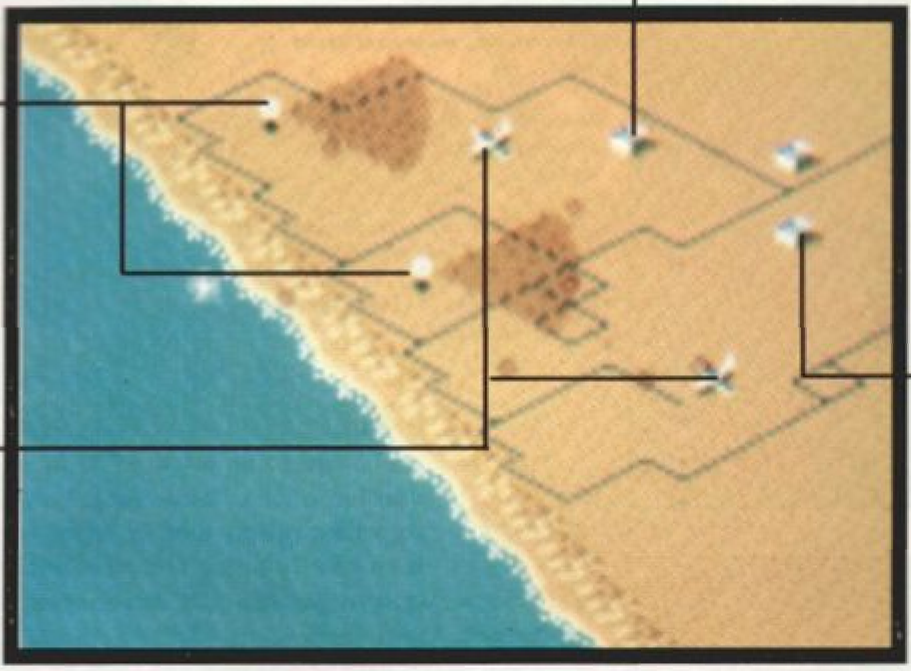
Stage Two- Power Station Pranks

When the going gets tough, the tough use their hell-fire rockets. Attack the power station from the left and you will find it easy to get within range. There's plenty of ammunition in the vicinity, so get well stuck in.


POWER
STATION
100 MEGAWATT
ARMOR: 400

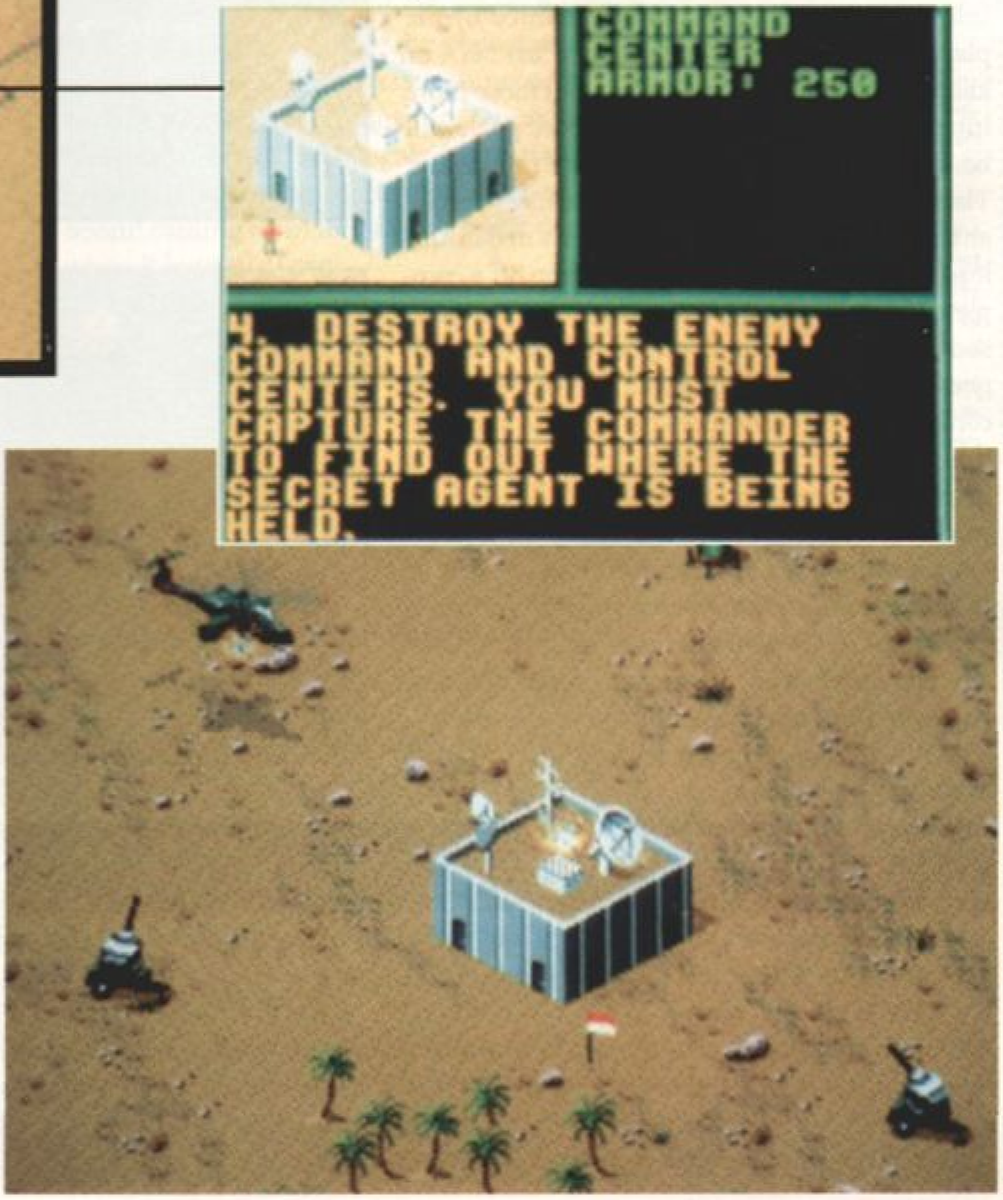
2. DESTROY THE POWER STATION TO CUT OFF THE ENEMY COMMAND CENTER AND AIR FIELDS. THE ENEMY WILL BE FORCED TO AIM HIS WEAPONS MANUALLY.





Stage Four- Command Centre Carnage

With an armour rating of 250, the command centre needs a whole bunch of missiles put into it before it'll cave in. It's not the easiest task to perform, especially since two automatic rocket launchers stand guard outside. Don't be a dummy like our pilot; shoot out these guys first and then work on the command centre. Good Luck!


COMMAND
CENTER
ARMOR: 250

4. DESTROY THE ENEMY COMMAND AND CONTROL CENTERS. YOU MUST CAPTURE THE COMMANDER TO FIND OUT WHERE THE SECRET AGENT IS BEING HELD.

This is Mission One. All relevant information to do with the current section of the campaign is stored in the handy Electronic Battlefield Computer, which can be called up at any time by simply hitting START. So come with us as we fly into the danger-zone and strike a blow for justice!

43▶ This all makes for a pretty potent mixture of action. Indeed, the frustrations endured when the player's final helicopter is downed right at the end of a tortuous mission are truly demoralising, but never quite bad enough to make future attempts unappealing.

Although he receives little help in combat situations, the player can make the most some limited ground support, normally on the outer markers of the combat area. Whenever he has rescued POWs or MIAs on board, the player can drop them off at one of these friendly sites. Usually there will be some fuel and/or ammunition available here, but more importantly the helicopter's armour will be replenished to a proportional degree depending on how many rescued troops are delivered back into allied hands.

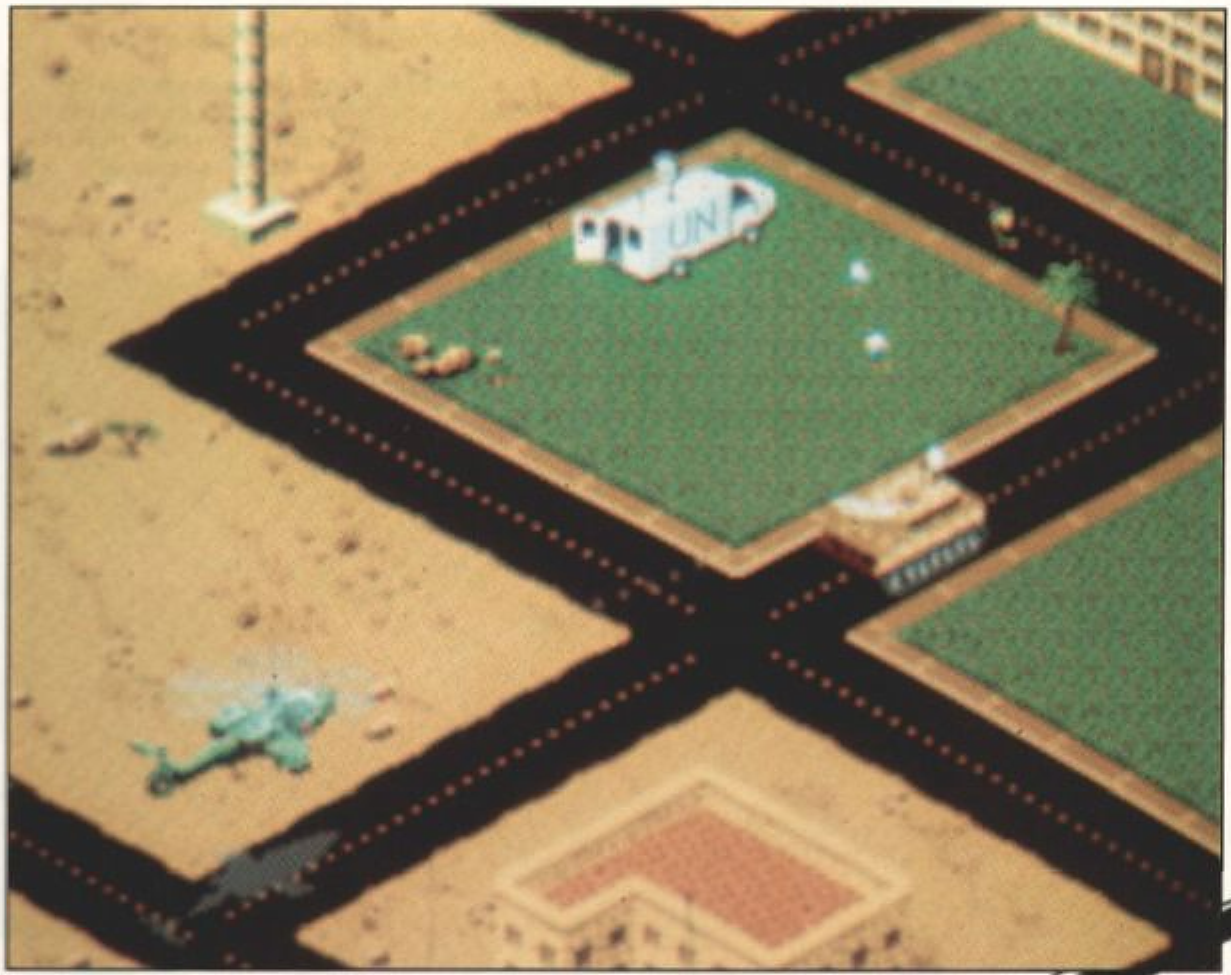
An unusual discipline must be learnt if Desert Strike pilots are going to have much success. The helicopter can only carry a certain amount of missiles and fuel, and its armour can only withstand six hundred points-worth of hits (whatever that works out as in bullets). So collecting goodies when the helicopter is already at a highly armed state is a complete waste of time, and will probably mean there will be no ammo left when it's really needed. Again, this adds to the drama, since the player is forced to continually make tricky decisions whether he can hold on for extra fuel or ammunition until the end of each firefight, ensuring that the subsequent goodie-scoop is of its utmost value.

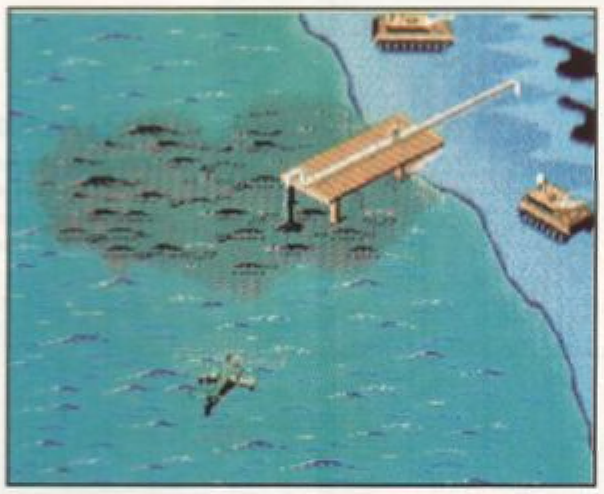
Another unusual feature is the way in which missions can be completed without a 100% success rate. Bonus points can be obtained by the players determined to scoop every last MIA or killing every single enemy soldier, but those more intent on seeing what their next set of goals will be can scoot through doing the bare minimum. This is especially handy during hostage rescue situations, since the helicopter has a maximum load of five passengers. Failing to drop off a complete bunch of rescued bodies may prevent a clean scoop of the next bunch of people. The flexibility of the game's interpretation of what makes a complete mission is a nice change. Also, it means that a loose shot which may accidentally kill a friendly prisoner won't throw away all the hard work done so far.

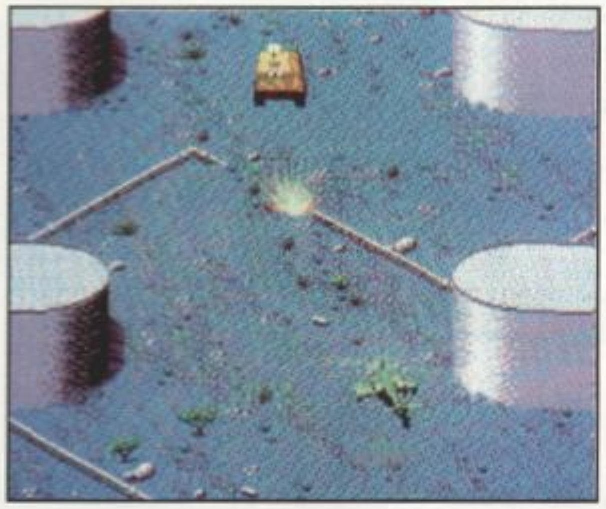
A message pops up in the left hand corner of the screen indicating when a mission has been completed. A "Return to Frigate" instruction will also pop up when all missions in the current combat zone have been finished, or the player has made such a fist of the whole thing that he needs to start all over again.

Although for much of the game the difficulty level falls into the 'hard but fair' category, there are a few elements which aren't quite as sharp as they could be. For a start, each new helicopter does not come fully armed. Only on take off from the carrier is the player 100% powered-up. Although the player starts the game with three lives, each successive helicopter used during the game DOES NOT come with full fuel or weapons. This is obviously a complete bind, since it's entirely plausible to be shot down when low on fuel, causing a restart with a shiny new helicopter with no gas. If the game is going to allow a new chopper to magically appear, why can't it be fully prepped?

Also, the finale of the second mission is the rescue of a bunch of POWs from an enemy camp. Soldiers in gun turrets form a deadly criss-cross of machine-gun fire. Men on the ground launch rockets at the chopper and just when all these







The contrasting missions of Desert Strike.

Above: rescue the United Nations advisers from the grasp of the evil Madman.

Left and Below: Stop that oil-leak. It's all gushing into the ocean and it had to be stopped. But will you be able to save the Earth from this eco-military nightmare?

Megadrive Version

Well. What can we say? This version of the game must hang together pretty well in order for it to justify being the first ever Megadrive game to get the ACE Screentest treatment. Apart from some slightly dodgy scrolling and a rather washed-out look to some of the graphics, Desert Strike looks like a dream and is a great game to play.

Amiga Version

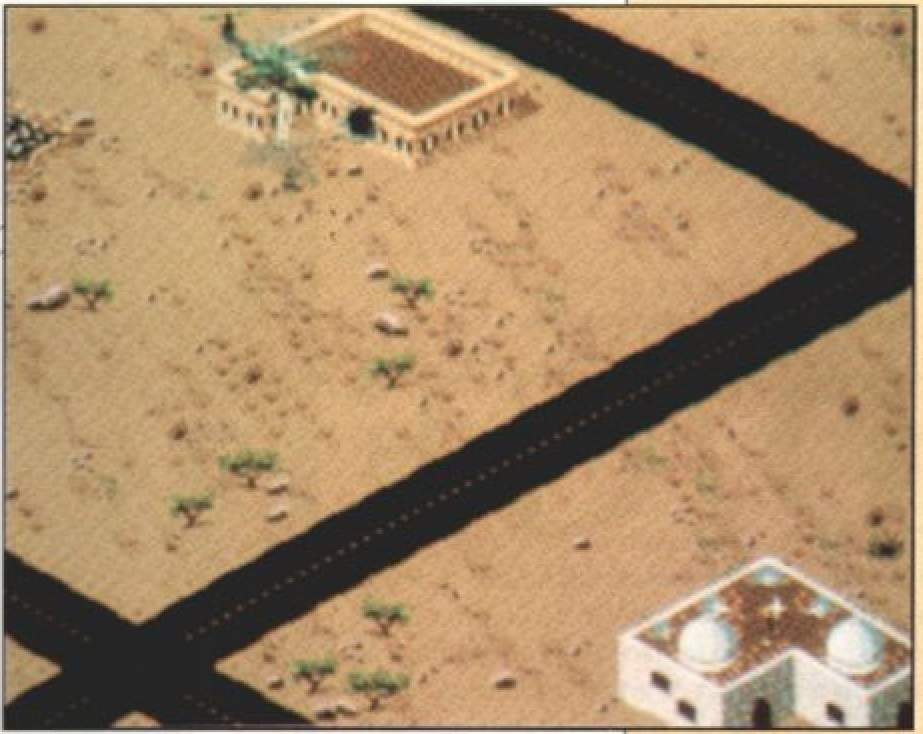
Yes. Those masters of the Megadrive Electronic Arts are preparing one of their most awesome Amiga conversions even as we speak. Depending on by the success of the Megadrive version, Amiga owners could look forward to playing Desert Strike as early as December. Now that would be a Christmas Cracker, wouldn't it?

ST Version

No versions planned as yet.

ST Version

It's the same story as with the ST - no version planned.



defences have been dealt with and the player is in the middle of his heroic airlift, two bloody great tanks appear and blow him all to bits.

Even though it's the end of the mission, this stage is completely out of step with the difficulty of the rest of the game, and brings play to a grinding halt time after time.

Like a lot of Megadrive games, Desert Strike is let down by some of its presentation. Explosions that should be enormous are merely large. Sound effects that should be roaring and throaty are sometimes a bit weedy and crap. Destruction of huge buildings expose this problem most adequately, since the explosions sound more like a Snap-It going off in someone's pocket than a skyscraper collapsing. On the whole, however the feel of grand scale destruction is well enough conveyed, with the most impressive kaboom! coming from the player's helicopter itself when it buys the farm.

So, if you don't find the Gulf theme too close to home and don't mind putting up with a few rough edges in your search for high-octane fun, Desert Strike is unmissable.

● **Jim Douglas**

A CRAZY COCKTAIL OF CARNAGE!

For fans of variety, Desert Strike will be a big draw. Okay, so you're stuck in a helicopter for the whole game, so there isn't much variety there. However, the missions offer enough variety to keep even gamers with the shortest attention spans happy. Although each mission follows a roughly logical path, often beginning with an attack on a radar base or power station in order to reduce the enemy's advanced warning systems, there's just so much excellent stuff contained in the wider brief that the game becomes a genuinely excellent romp. UN advisers must be rescued. SCUD launchers must be destroyed. Prisoners of War must be airlifted away from their captors. Biological weapons scientists must be captured and interrogated. And there's even the chance to destroy the Madman's luxury yacht. While plenty of games have boasted similar elements, none have combined them to such entertaining effect. It's also a nice change to have such a balls-out blaster from the home of High-Brow entertainment, Electronic Arts. Hurrah!

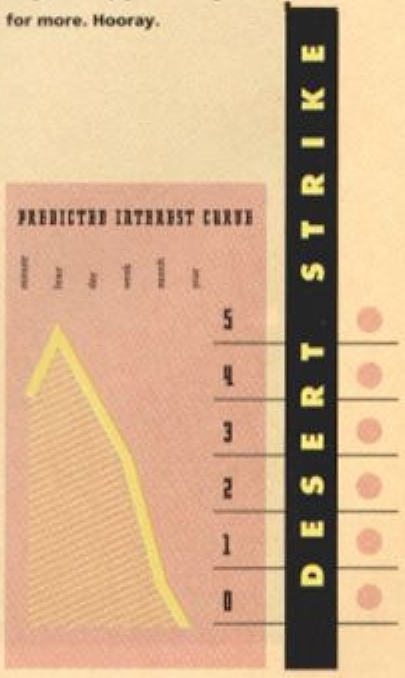
RATINGS

👍	👎
Good mix of shootin 'n' thinkin'. Easy to get into. Good escalation of difficulty	A bit unpolished looking. Multiple enemies slow the action significantly.

890 MEGADRIVE RATING

G	IQ	A	IF
7	3	5	9

It's hardly Civilization, but hey, who cares? These games aren't built to last. They're built for a massive entertainment over a short period. And aside for a couple of reservations, Desert Strike delivers in spades. The controls are simple to pick up but continually rewarding as the player becomes more proficient. And it all holds together remarkably well. And there's even enough variety and challenge to keep you coming back for more. Hooray.

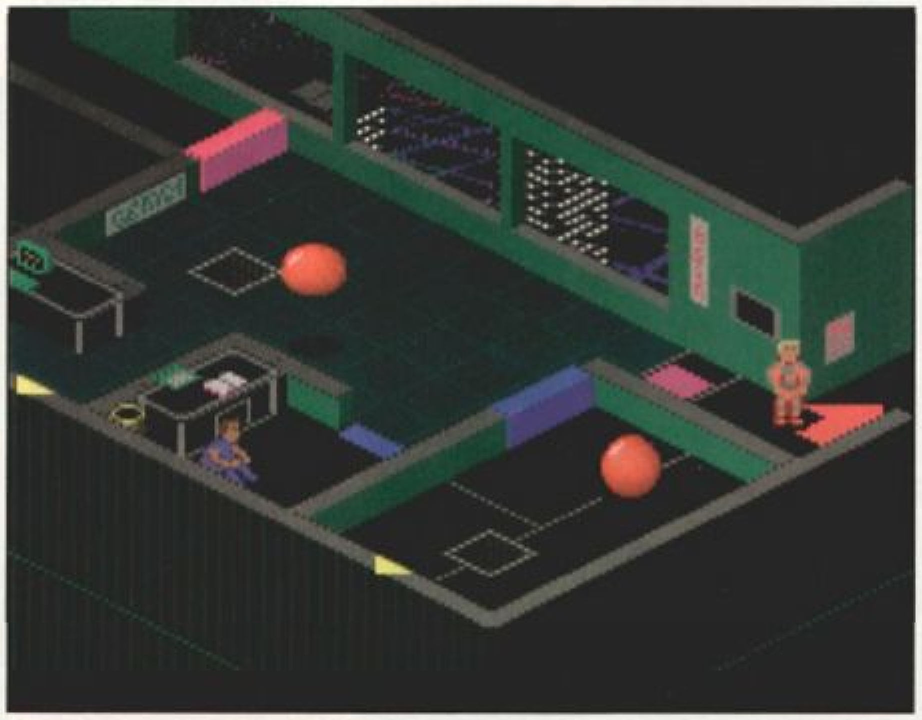


Genre Puzzle/Arcade Blast
Publisher Mindscape
Developer Robert Cook and Jim Brown
Release TBA

D/GENERATION

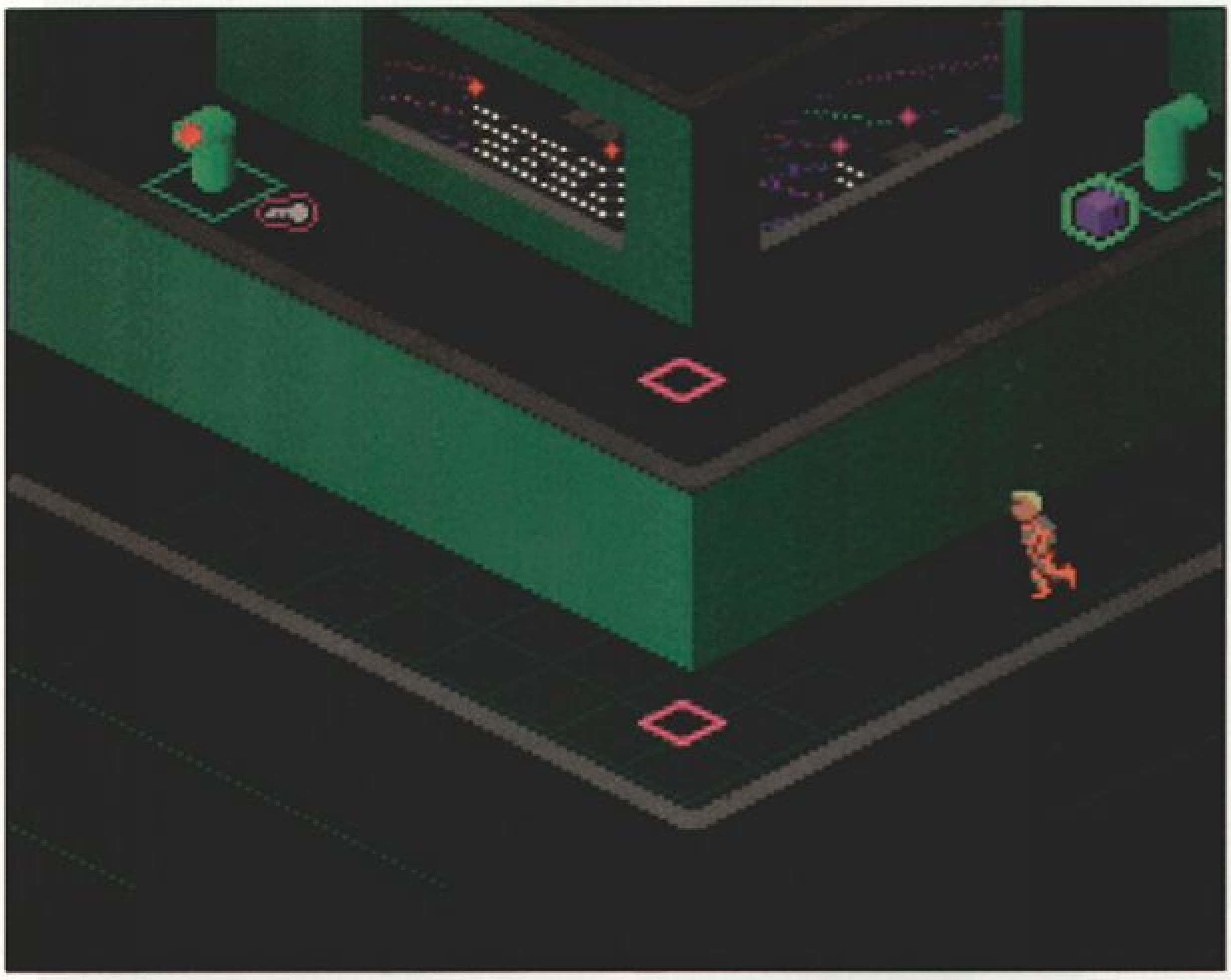
DATELINE 26th June 2021: The unthinkable has happened. A major accident at the Genoq biological weapons laboratory in Singapore has resulted in the entire research complex being taken over, with the scientists inside now held hostage by their own freakish creations. With mutants of the A, B and C generations running rampant around the building threatening the lives of everyone inside things are already bad enough, but with the company's latest prototype weapon - the awesome, shape-changing D/Generation also on the verge of escape, every life on Earth could well be at stake!

Oh dear. Well, you know what's called for in this kind of grave situation, don't you? Yup, that's right, an unlikely hero. In this case, mankind's hope for the future comes in the form of a lowly dispatch rider charged with delivering an anonymous package to one of Genoq's top doc. Oblivious to the situation, the courier jetpacks (it's the only way to travel) onto the roof of the Genoq building and ventures inside. Into a world of terror...



Of course, you've heard it all before in one way or another. Hopelessly-inadequate everyday Joe battles deadly adversaries against impossible odds and wins - hopefully, anyway. But while D/Generation's story may be essentially as old as the hills, the game it's surrounded by is as atmospheric and involving as any you're likely to find. It's not particularly complex or in any way deep - it's just a straight arcade adventure with a puzzle-based slant that calls primarily for dexterity, speed and an agile mind.

The Genoq complex is presented as a maze-like landscape of individual isometric-perspective rooms, divided into smaller groups where each level is a storey of the building - you start on level 80 and work your way up. Though the manual text provides some brief background, the vast majority of the plot - who caused the accident, what exactly's going on and so on remains a mystery. The blanks are filled in by the computer-controlled characters that the player meets along the way - the first of which is Genoq's unfortunate receptionist who is being hassled by a haywire security robot when the player first enters the building. Dispatching the robot effectively rescues the receptionist, who goes on to tell you of the importance of your package and how badly the mysterious doctor Derrida is after it. From then on it's up to



you to find the doc, put an end to the bio-tyranny and get to the bottom of the enigma.

Though each level of the Genoq complex works as a single area, with the various screens interconnecting in the usual map-like fashion, each screen is pretty much an independent game, presenting its own individual set of puzzles and arcade challenges. In each one the object is nothing more complicated than getting from one doorway to the other, collecting any useful objects and rescuing hostages along the way, although the building's sophisticated security systems and the malevolent neogens (the bio-weapons) conspire to make that simple task as un-simple as possible. Unarmed and inexperienced, the player's initial resources are few and far between, especially considering the ferocity and efficiency of his opponents. The character walks in eight directions around the 3D environment, with no ability to jump, duck or otherwise avoid alien attack - apart from running away, of course. Fortunately, there's a laser weapon to be found near the start, and packages of grenades later on, considerably shortening the player's odds of survival.

Weaponry and violence will only solve a small percentage of the problems thrown up by the game, however, and at least 75% of the time, quick thinking and nimble fingers are the only things that will see you through. The automated security systems may have gone berserk, but they're as efficient and deadly as ever. The dangers range from electrified plates in the floor that flash on and off (they all run to a preset, learnable sequence) to rotating laser turrets that look like drainpipes sticking up from the floor. As they turn through 360 degrees, they can only see the player if the "eye" is pointed right at you - the trick is to walk round it in a circle, keeping its back to you at all times.

Considerably more dangerous than these automated bad-guys, however, are the biological neogens. Emanating from generators in the floor, they arrive in deadly forms as the player progresses. Originally they appear as big, red bouncing balls, and later on turn into big, blue bouncing cylinders, but the effect is much the same. What makes these creatures so dangerous is that they home in on the player as soon as he comes into their field of vision, "cloaking" themselves by turning into a transparent outline that makes them more difficult to see. A single laser shot puts paid to each one, but that won't stop them coming - the only way to do that is get to the generator itself and shut it off by walking over it. Towards the end of the game the neogens become even more advanced, possessing shape-imitated powers not unlike Terminator 2's T-1000 which means that any person or inanimate object could be death in disguise. Nasty.

> ***In essence, D/Generation is a very old-fashioned game, harking back to old 8-bit isometric puzzle classics like Knight Lore and Get Dexter.***

Since the electronic systems enemies can't be knocked out by weapons, and there are often too many at once on a screen to make evasion impractical, an alternative is to try to deactivate the systems by means of the electronic switches that are a regular feature of almost every room. Some rooms have more than others, and there's no way to telling what a switch may do other than grit-

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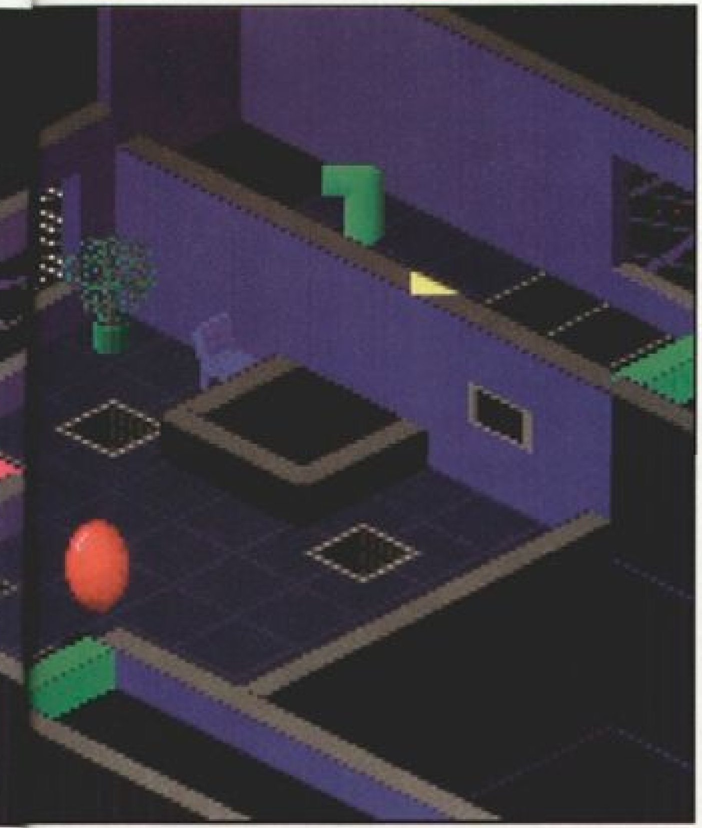
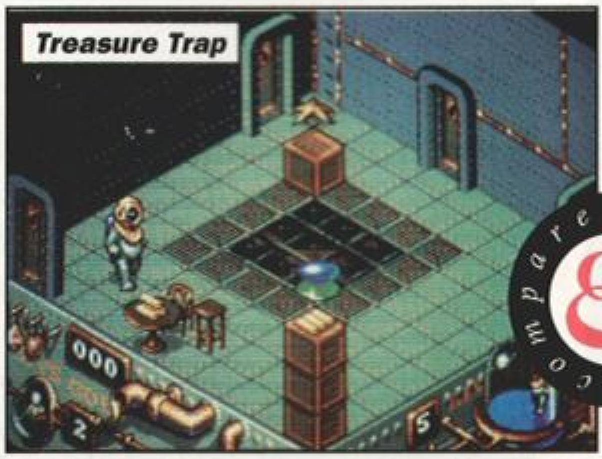
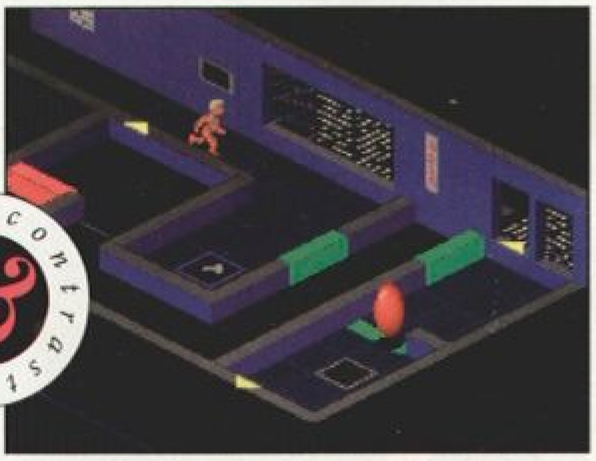




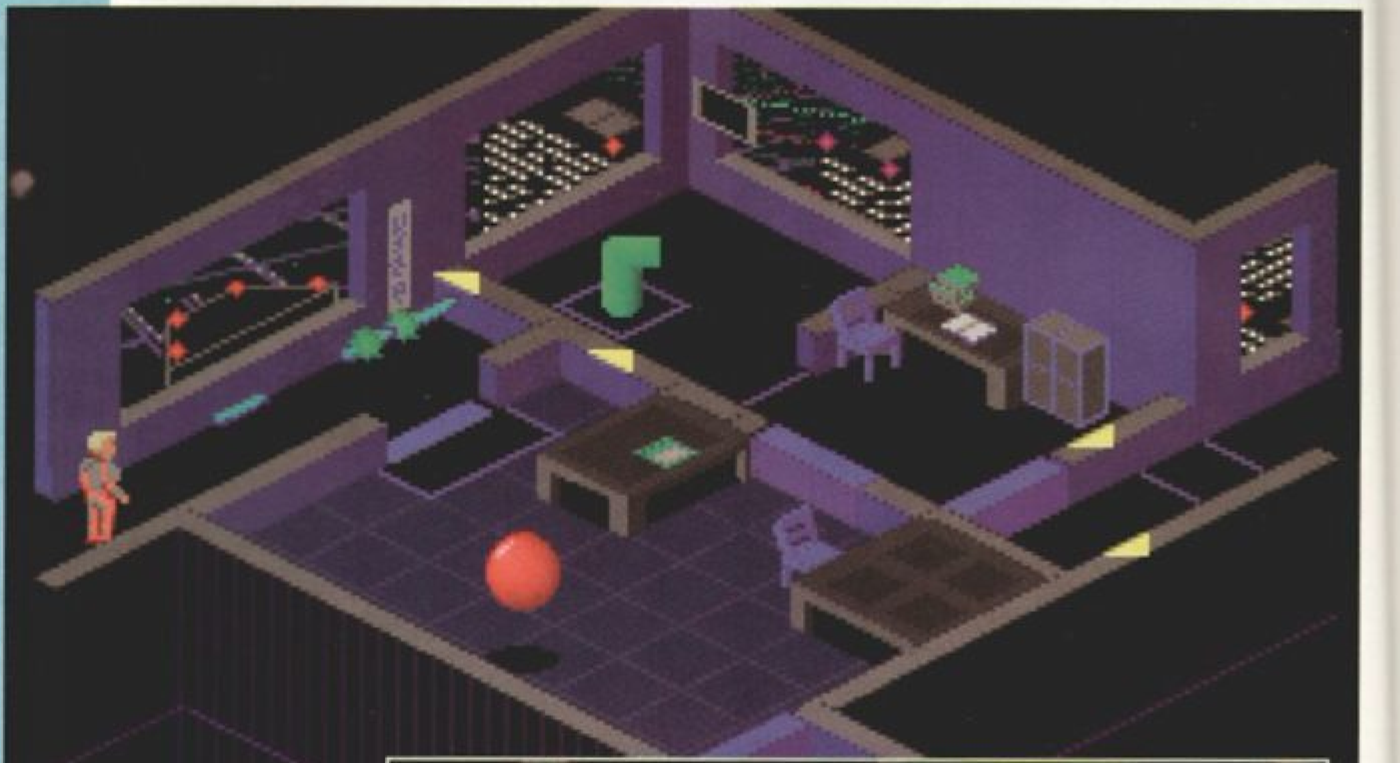
compare & contrast



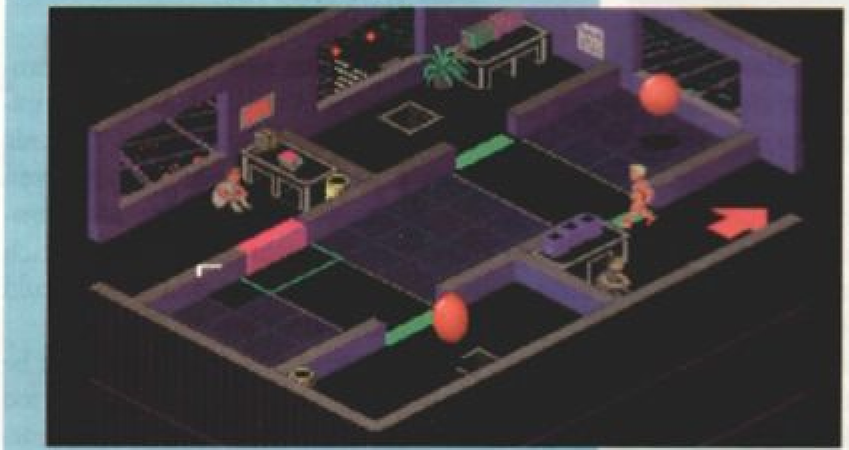
Phew! To be honest, there's not a great deal to compare something like D/Generation too, as games in the isometric genre are so few and far between. Probably the best game in the genre prior to this is Electronic Zoo's very fine underwater adventure Treasure Trap. Combining arcade skills and puzzles in a similar way to D/Generation, it certainly offers a hefty and long-lasting challenge, although many players may find the slow character movement and heavyweight puzzles a bit too much for their liking. The fast, pacy and none-too taxing style of D/Generation makes it a better bet all round for those on the lookout for a game of this type. So there.

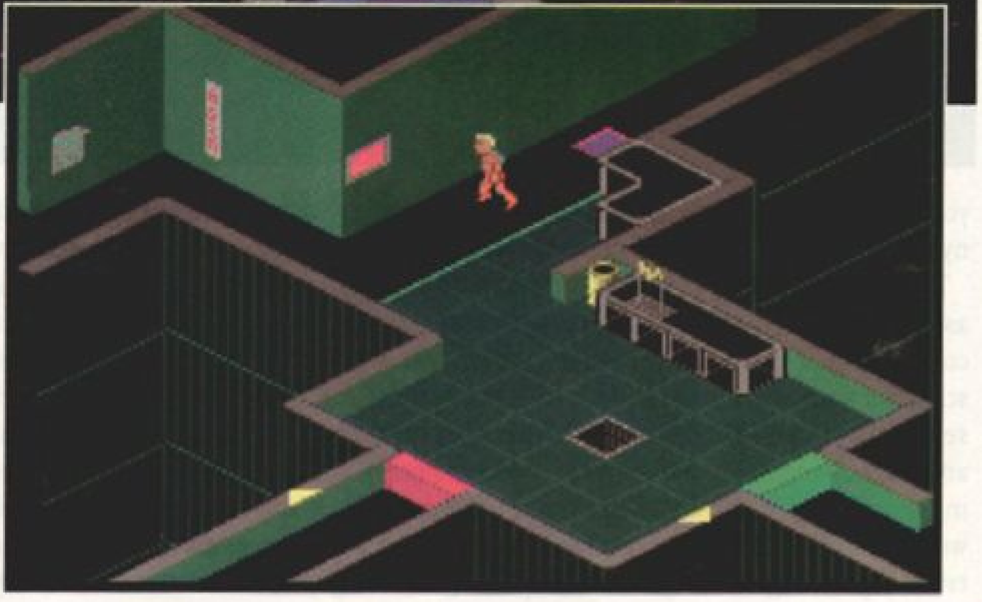
D/GENERATION

(Left)One of D/Generation's more taxing screens combines both types of deadly enemies - in the first room there's an A/Generation neogen to contend with, and the next is protected by a turret laser weapon. The bouncing neogen can be knocked out by a laser shot, but the rotating turret is invincible, so the player must try to sneak past stealthily instead. Not easy...

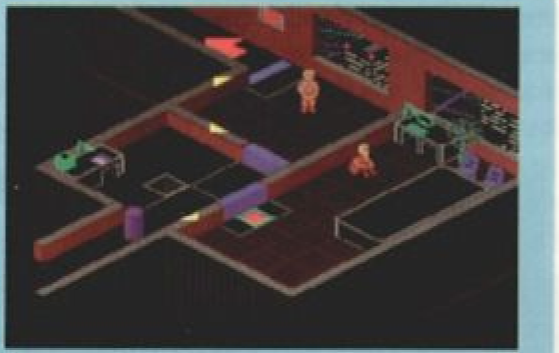


(Below) There's a hostage in the room at the far end of the screen, guarded by two neogens - it's no problem offing them, but the shape of the switch by the red door means that you won't be getting in there until you've collected the right key. If you haven't already got it, it's time to turn back and start searching...

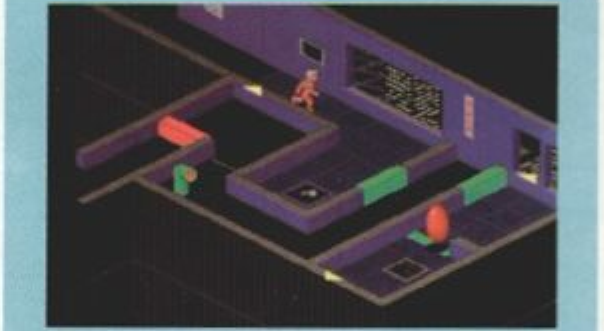




(Above) The main danger on this screen is presented by a large section in the centre of the room that's protected by a roving sequence of electrocuted tiles. In addition, there's a neogen generator right in the centre of it all. The sequence of the tiles can be learned, but less patient players are more likely just to take their chances and run for it, hoping they don't get fried. This room needs to be traversed twice - once from the top entrance, and later on from the door at the bottom left.

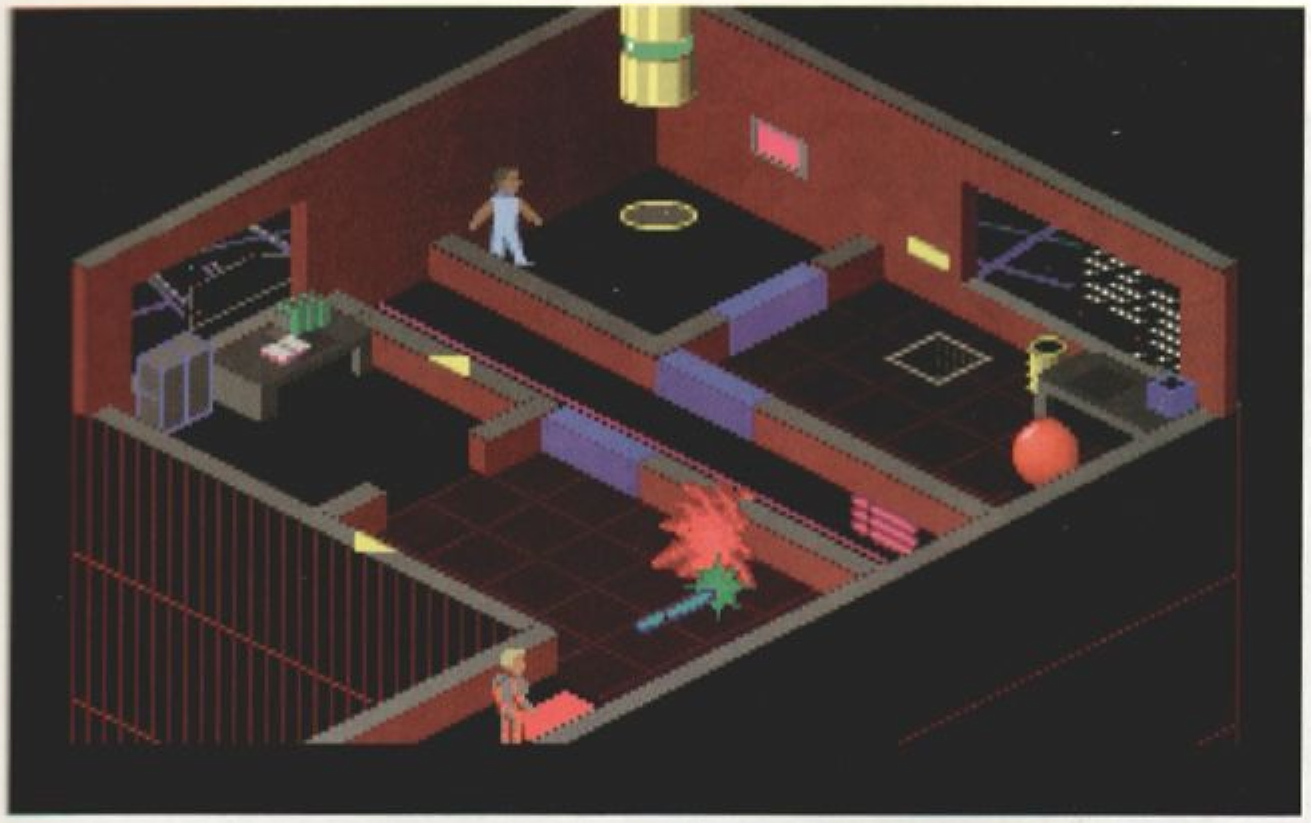


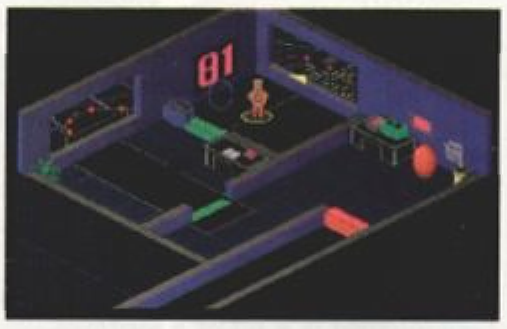
The laser weapon's reflective potential allows for some nifty tricks, using rights angles to hit targets hidden behind walls or other structures.



Oh dear. Looks like you're dead, mate. An A/Generation neogen has cloaked itself and is only a second away from consuming the player. Don't just stand there, shoot it!

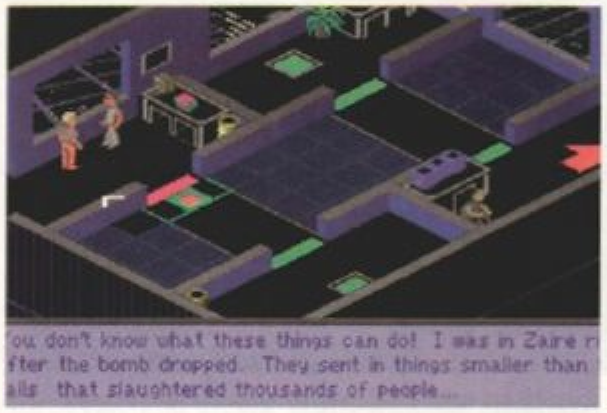
The player can certainly find himself right up against it at times in D/Generation. Each individual screen can be a veritable labyrinth of devious puzzles and traps, many of which can only be survived if completed in the right order, at the right time. In order to get you ready for what's to come, we present a selection of scenes from D/Generation's first two levels. Don't expect this to prepare you for what lies beyond, though...



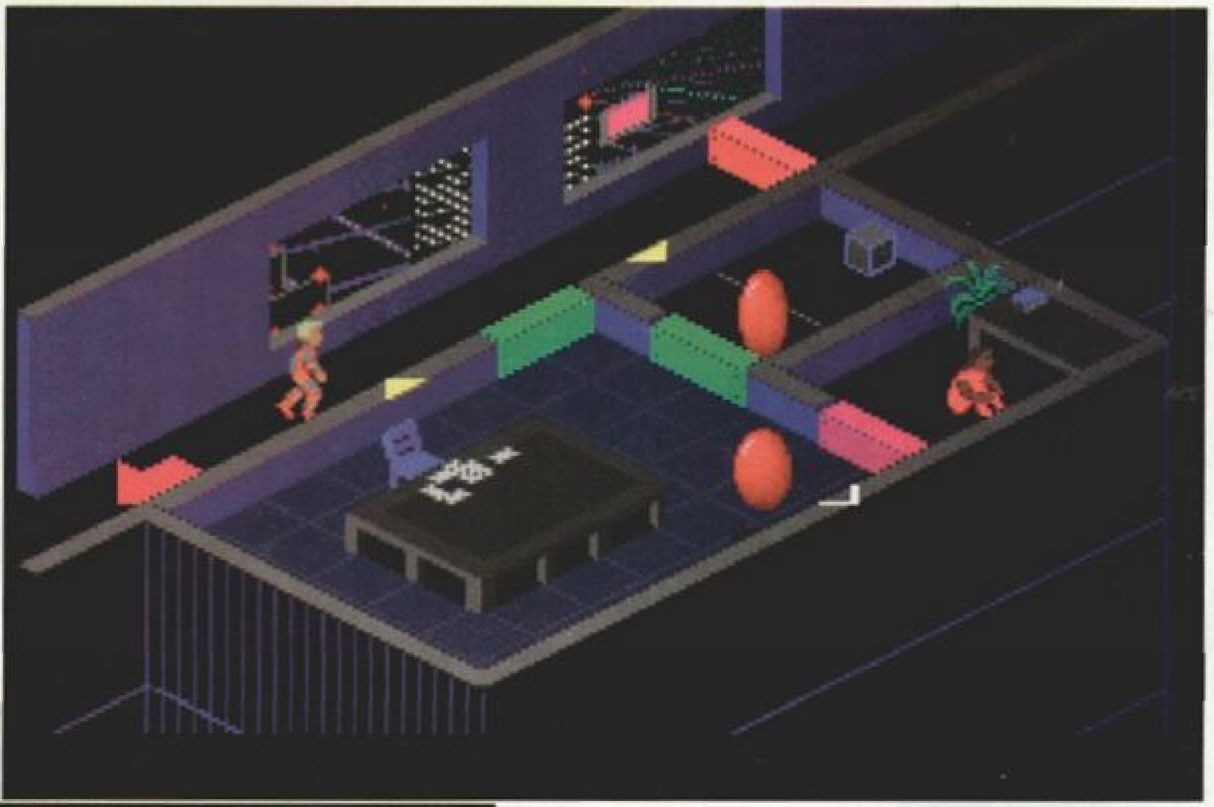


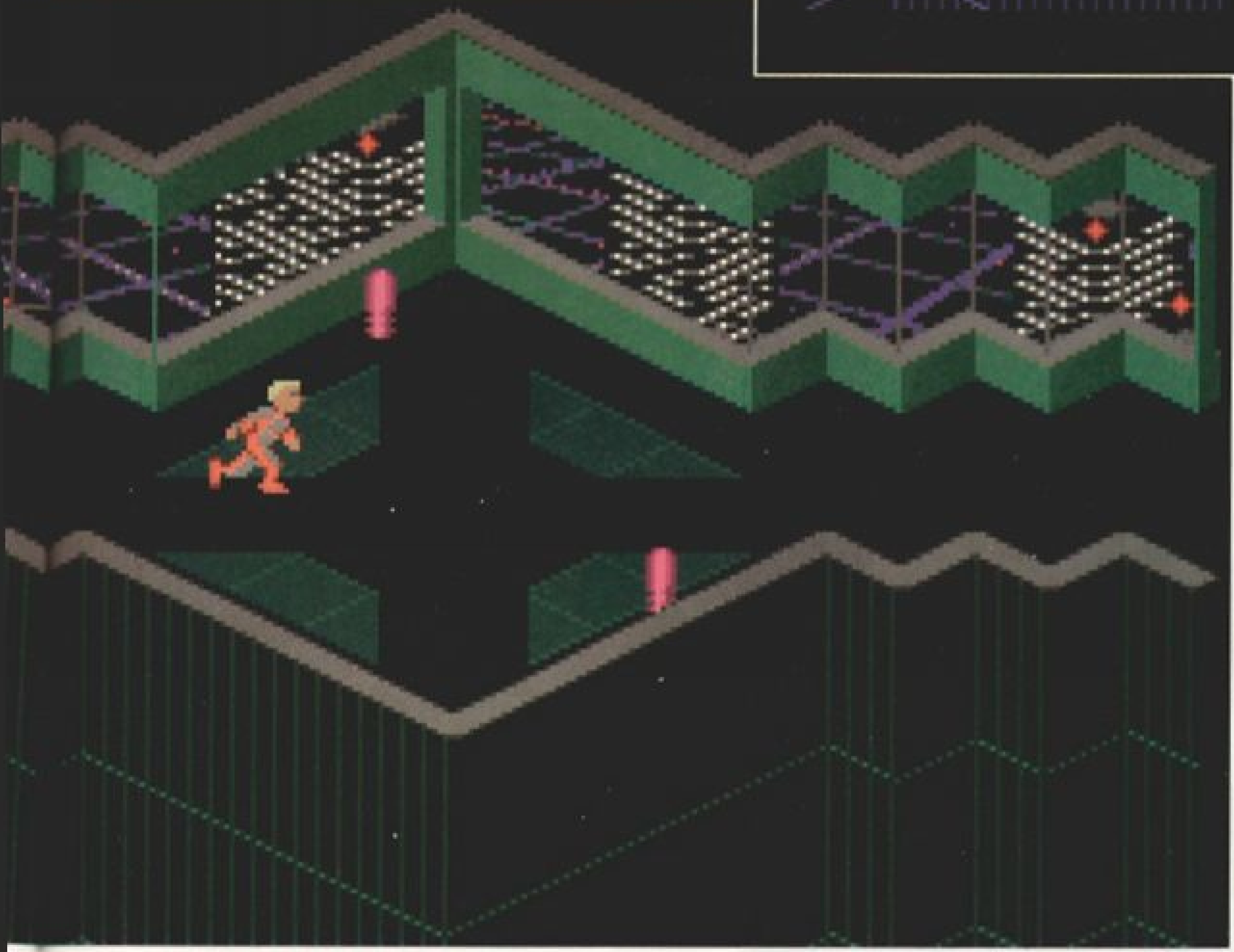
(Above) Things get noticably tougher whenever a new floor is reached. Here, on the 81st floor, the player is instantly attacked by a roving neogen, and once they're dispatched there's a complex dual-function switch system that needs to be sussed in order to get out of the room.

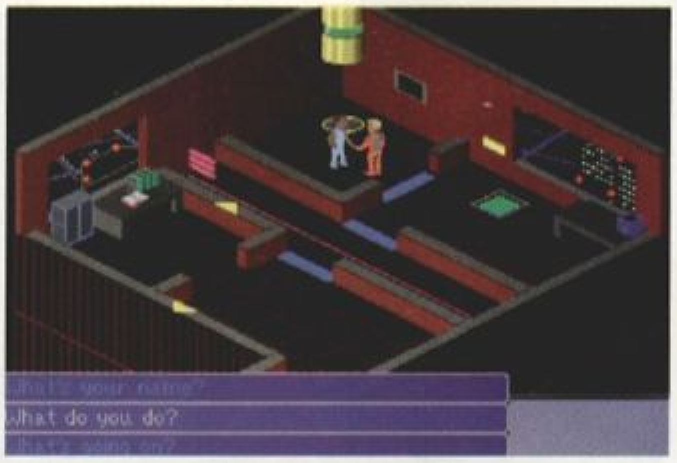
An elusive security key has been located on the 80th floor, which will give crucial access to other parts of the level. The only problem is, it's protected by a trio of fast-moving laser forcefields. The player can shuffle through them safely with careful timing, but extra care must be taken when collecting the key at the end, as it's placed over an elctrified pad. Timing is of the essence...



ou don't know what these things can do! I was in Zaire r
fter the bomb dropped. They sent in things smaller than
ails that slaughtered thousands of people...







What's your name?
What do you do?
What's going on?

(Above) Hoorah! You've reached the end of the first level (the circular transporter mat sends you to the next), and you've just rescued a scientist who'll give you some valuable plot information to take with you.

(Left) One of the more physically-orientated screens. The two laser bolts orbit the central section of the floor separately, and to pass safely the player must time his walk between the beams with pinpoint precision. This type of side-on corridor screen appears later on in the game with different enemies, and naturally different strategies are required to get past.

D/GENERATION

PC Version

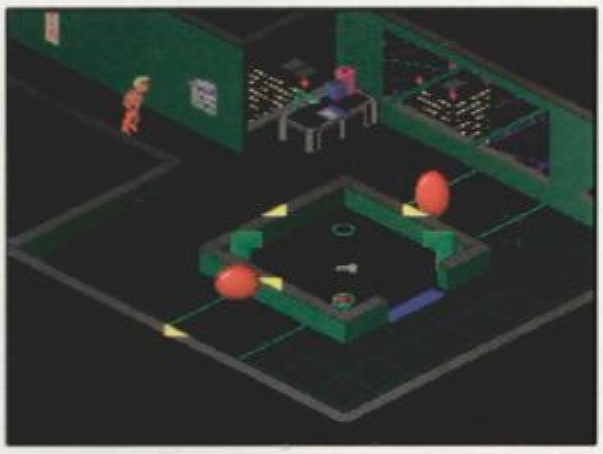
Graphically, D/Generation is suprisingly effective considering the simplicity of the sprites and backgrounds. The primarily colours used make the VGA version look almost like EGA, but it works well nevertheless. The simple nature of the game means that it'll run well on the lower-end machines, although the lack of any sound card support is a bit of a letdown.

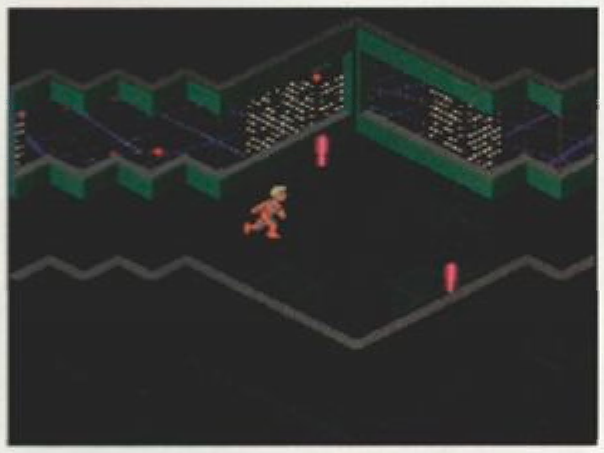
Amiga Version

No firm details as yet, although the chances are that a Commodore version should be in the pipeline soon, with a possible release for around the end of the year.

ST Version

It's more or less the same story here as with the Amiga. You'll just have to wait and see...





49▸

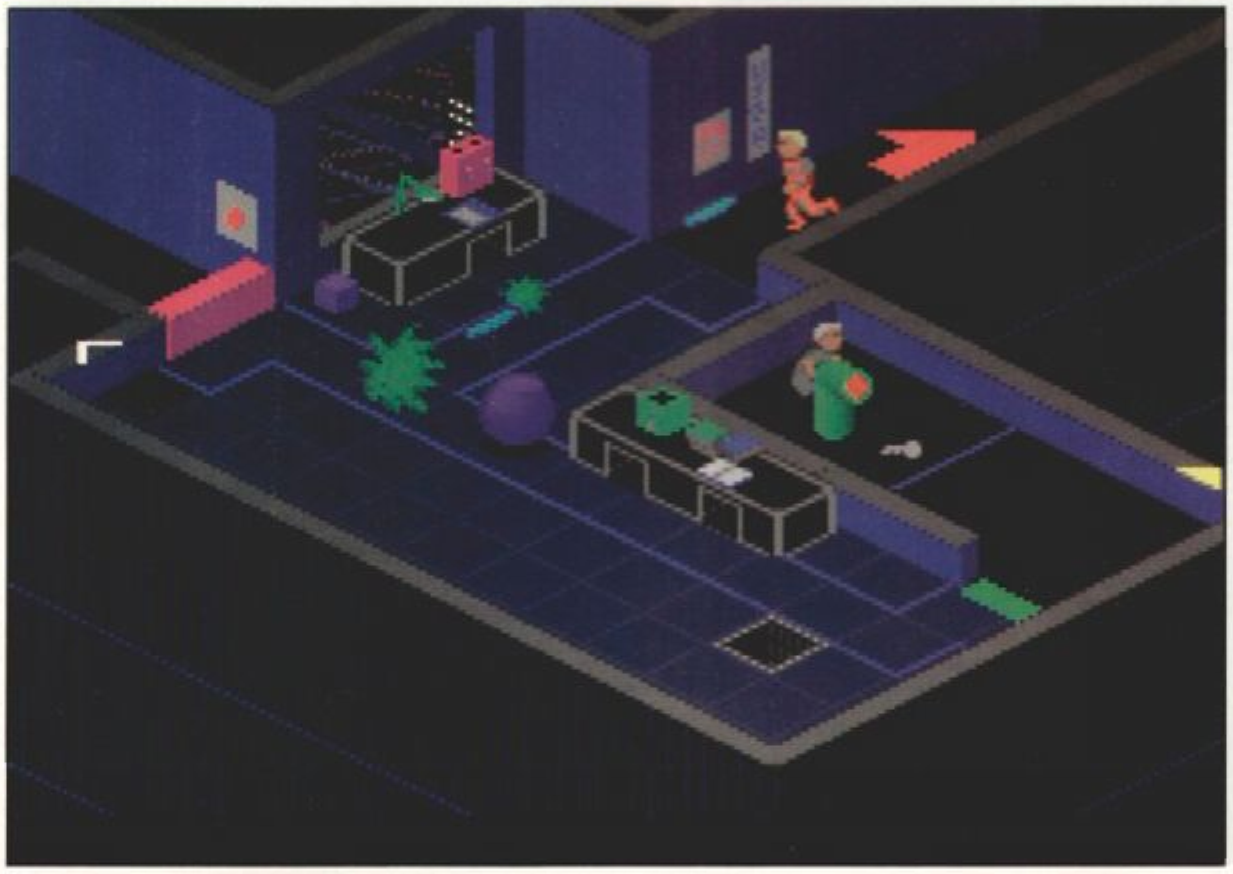
ting your teeth and hitting it. Their most common purpose is the opening and closure of security doors, allowing access to other parts of a room, or from one to the next. And, of course, they can toggle the security droids on and off. As the player progresses onto new floors, the function of the switches becomes more complex. Some may activate more than one system - for example, a switch that opens a vital door may close another simultaneously, or even activate a security droid in the same room. Progress still further, and switches are secured so that they can only be activated once the right key has been found from somewhere else on the level.

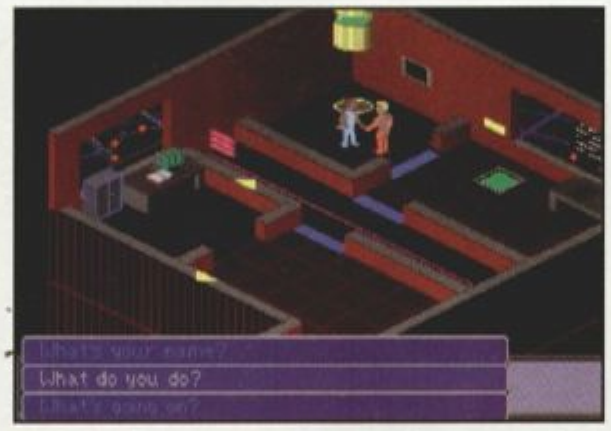
This simplistic puzzle aspect is enhanced considerably by the clever utilisation of the player's weapon. Though it can be used as just a basic blaster to knock out neogens, it does have other, more diverse purposes. Since the laser bolts the player fires are reflective, they bounce off walls at right angles. By firing at the right wall from the right position, a laser beam can be sent ricocheting all the way around a room, either to hit a neogen that you'd rather not have see you or even activate a switch that's too dangerous to get to and toggle by hand. It's not exactly Tetris, but it does add a more cerebral feel to the proceedings.

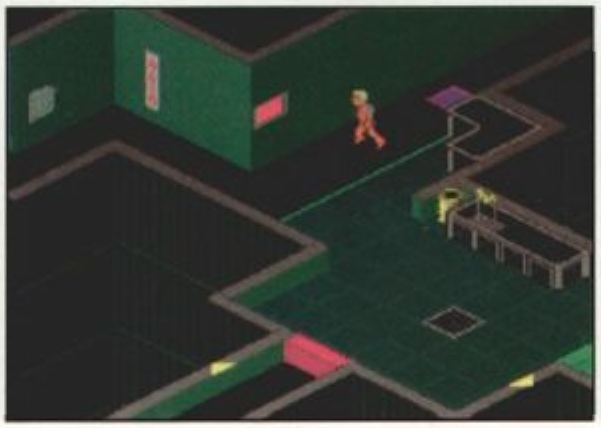
The game also has a slight adventurey, mystery thread as provided by the characters the player meets every few rooms or so. They're normally to be found cowering behind a desk or cabinet somewhere in the room, and once the player gets to him or her there's the chance to engage in a conversation that may reveal some important clues. The player can direct the conversation in a limited sense by selecting a reply from a list whenever it's his turn to speak. In each case the information is limited, but the story starts to take form once you've chatted to several people, with each character adding a piece to the puzzle. Once a chat with a character's over, you've then got to escort the hostage safely out of the room, back past the neogens and gun turrets by directing them to the exit marked with a red arrow. Points are awarded for each hostage ushered out of the building.

The end of a level is reached when the player finds a room with a large suction tube hanging from the ceiling. Walking under it transports the player to the start of the next storey - and a new restart point. At first the game seems unfair, penalising the player with death for seemingly silly little mistakes. Fortunately, an ample amount of lives are provided, and you're warned when down to your last life. One more mistake and you're sent back to the start of the current level - which can be quite a long way, as though the maps aren't particularly large, they've been designed so the player often has to take the longest, most torturous route in order to collect the keys and objects required in the correct order.

In essence, D/Generation is a very old-fashioned game, harking back to old 8-bit isometric puzzle classics like Knight Lore and Get Dexter. It's a viewpoint and genre that's been woefully neglected on the heftier machines, and recent efforts like Voodoo Knightmare and Treasure Trap, nice though they are, just don't quite cut the mustard. D/Generation is a whole lot more playable and fun than other efforts in this field because the designers know how to use this kind of isometric display to its best advantage. Unlike many isometric games, D/Generation doesn't rely on one particular style of gameplay. There's a fine mix

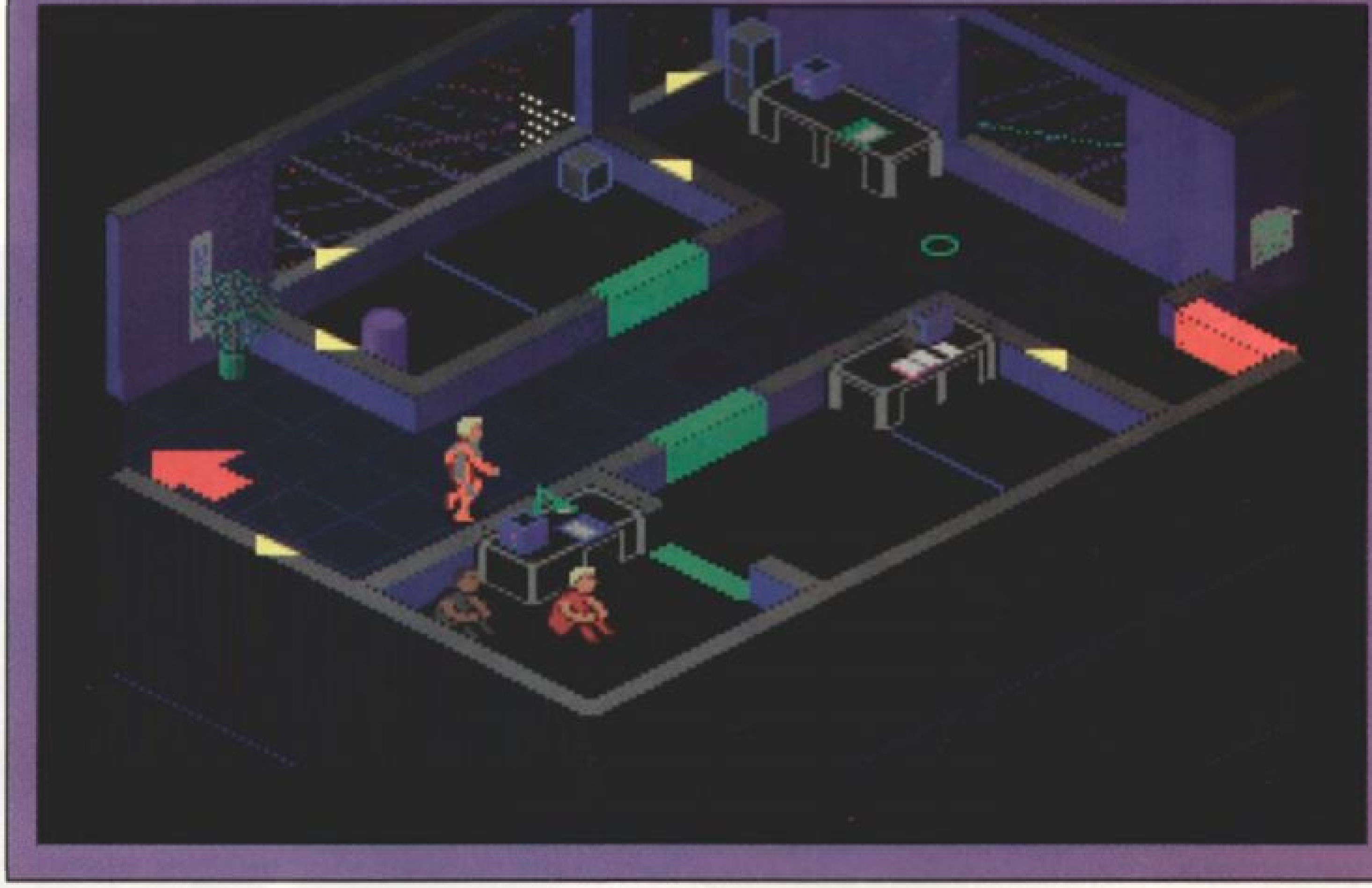






THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Lumme! Could it be that at last we're seeing good, old-fashioned games making a comeback. With the likes of the excellent Dynablaster (previewed last month), several others and now this, it could be that fancy, sophisticated software may have to roll over to make way for a resurgence of games where playability, not arty graphics and sound, is the key. Let's hope so...

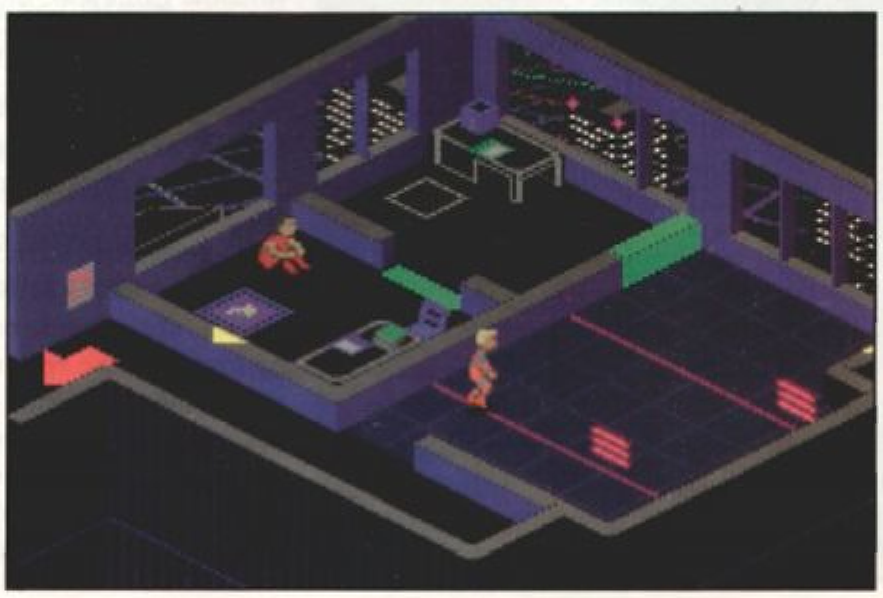


of puzzle and arcade stuff, with the emphasis being on dextral control of the central character at all times. The puzzles have been designed so that they require brainpower to figure them out in the first place, then arcade skills to execute the plan of action - and it works really very well. People who are instantly turned off by the word "puzzle" shouldn't worry - there's nothing really migraine-inducing. The difficulty level is set not by the trickiness of individual posers, but by the large volume of them throughout the game.

The game's environment has been well designed, so that screens that are small actually seem spacious and full of mystery. The storyline and brooding graphic style does a lot to pump up the atmosphere and drive the player forward. But however well the whole thing has been put together, there is one problem - the control of the character. If you don't have the luxury of a joystick, you may find the numeric keypad control, simple though it is, frustrating and sometimes deadly, as the player's sprite is left stranded in the middle of a deadly situation while you try to find the right key to move him. There's an alternative key set-up, but it doesn't make things much better, and only those with the highest levels of digit dexterity are likely to master the keys. In a game like this, a redefinable keyboard option is practically a necessity, and yet the programmers have seen fit not to include one. As the say on Points of View, why oh why...?

Annoying it may be, but I wouldn't let the fiddly control but you off D/Generation, particularly if this sort of thing is your bag as chances are you've been suffering withdrawal for some considerable time now. It's definitely one of the better isometric games that I've seen, and should come as a particular joy to PC gamers fed up with high-brow simulations and adventures and looking for something with a little more oomph. Because this is it.

● Gary Whitta



Top-hole combination of arcade and puzzle challenges.

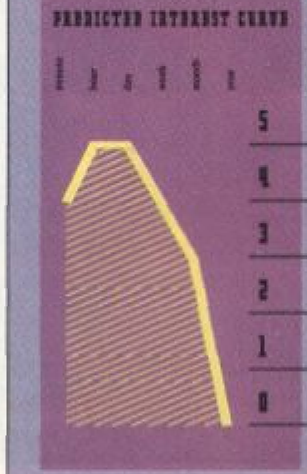
Atmospheric, colourful graphics set the mood.

Feeble sound effects.

885 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	7	2	8

Even though there's a lot to D/Generation, its friendly presentation and easygoing style makes it no trouble to pick up and learn in a few minutes, even without documentation. This is a state of affairs marred only slightly by the sometimes fiddly controls which can, at times, be very frustrating. The difficulty has been well-graded, with new enemies and more devious screen layouts introudced with each new level. It's tricky to say how long D/Generation will last, but provided you don't find it too tricky or annoying, chances are there's a good solid month of enjoyment here. It's good, lightweight stuff, and comes heartily recommended.



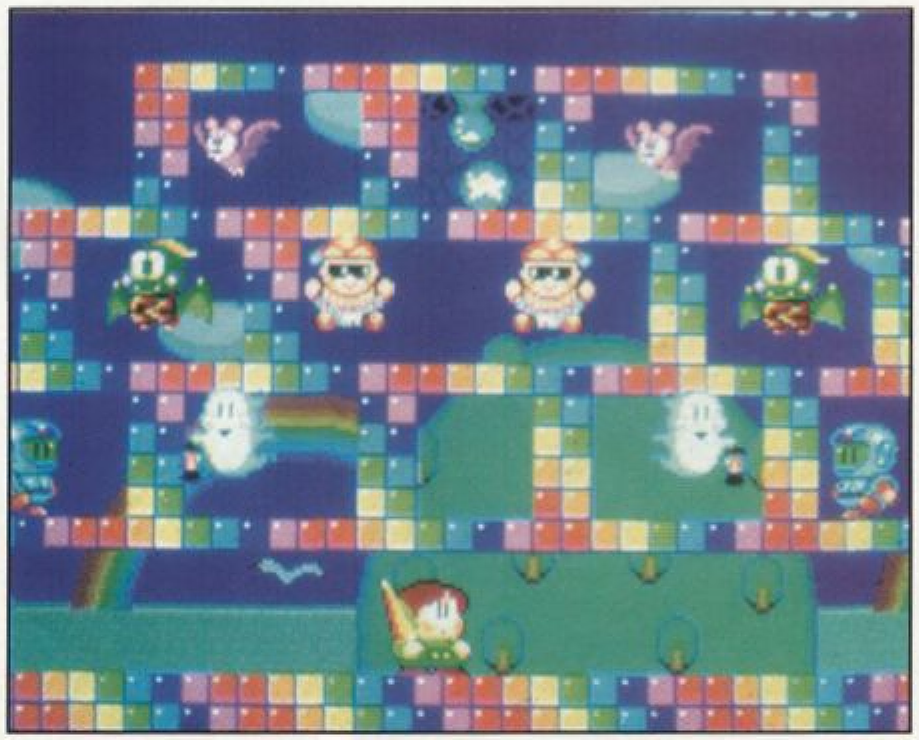
D/GENERATION RATINGS

Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean
Developer In-House
Release 23 March £25.99

PARASOL

Over the next month or so, the right-thinking sensibilities of the games buying public will be assaulted in a most insidious and distressing manner. Thousands and thousands of words will drone on about how funny and fluffy and zany the game they call Parasol Stars is, and what a kooky and kerrazy milestone in gaming history it represents. But let's not kid ourselves. It's just another bleeding platform game with useless animation, isn't it?

It's tricky to cite a more sickening example of a game designer's imagination gone mad than Bub & Bob, "heroes" of the Bubble Bobble series. With their big rolling eyes and their dungarees, their stupid little puckered lips and their silly red hair, they make the most nauseating duo since The Krankies.

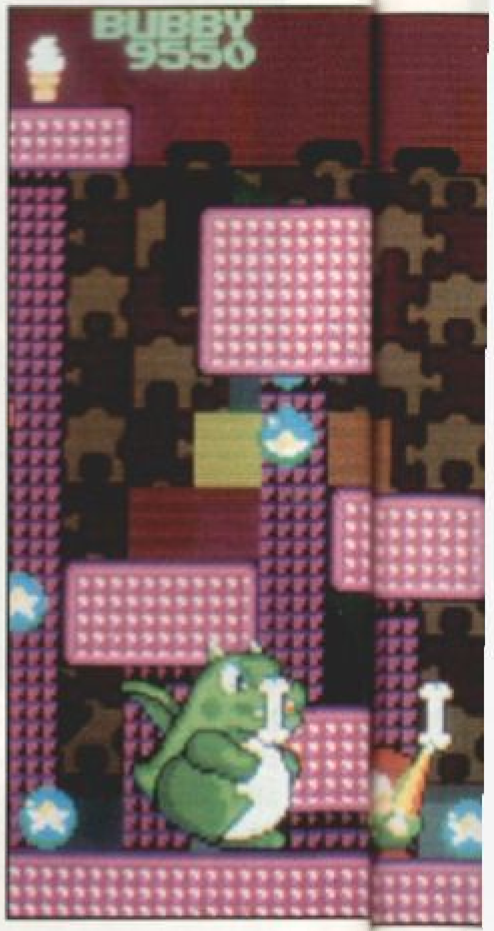


The theory that such undiluted Japaneseyness may prove a little exotic for the Western palette is borne out by the fact that the previous Bub and Bob coin-ops (Bubble Bobble and Rainbow Islands) have consistently fared worse than even the most tired arcade shoot-'em-ups.

The adventures of the loathsome twosome have fared considerably better on home formats, however, with Firebird and Ocean enjoying much chart-topping success with Bubble Bobble and Rainbow Islands respectively. Maybe playing with two fat little cherubs is acceptable in the privacy of one's own home.

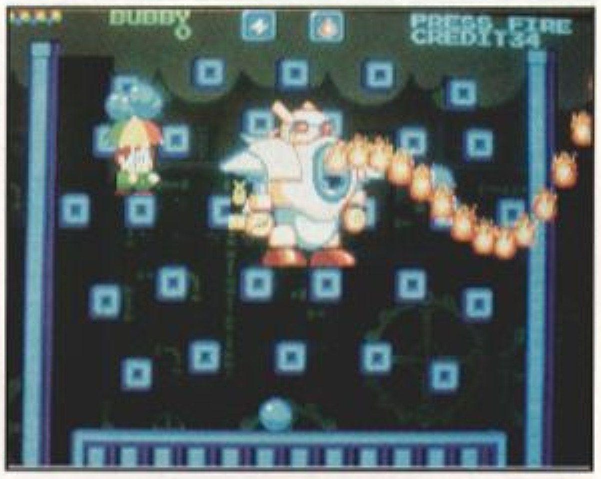
And let's face it, once you've grown to accept the graphic style which is not entirely dissimilar to a nasty acid trip and come to terms with the unusual gameplay, the series provides amusement which, if nothing else, isn't really available elsewhere.

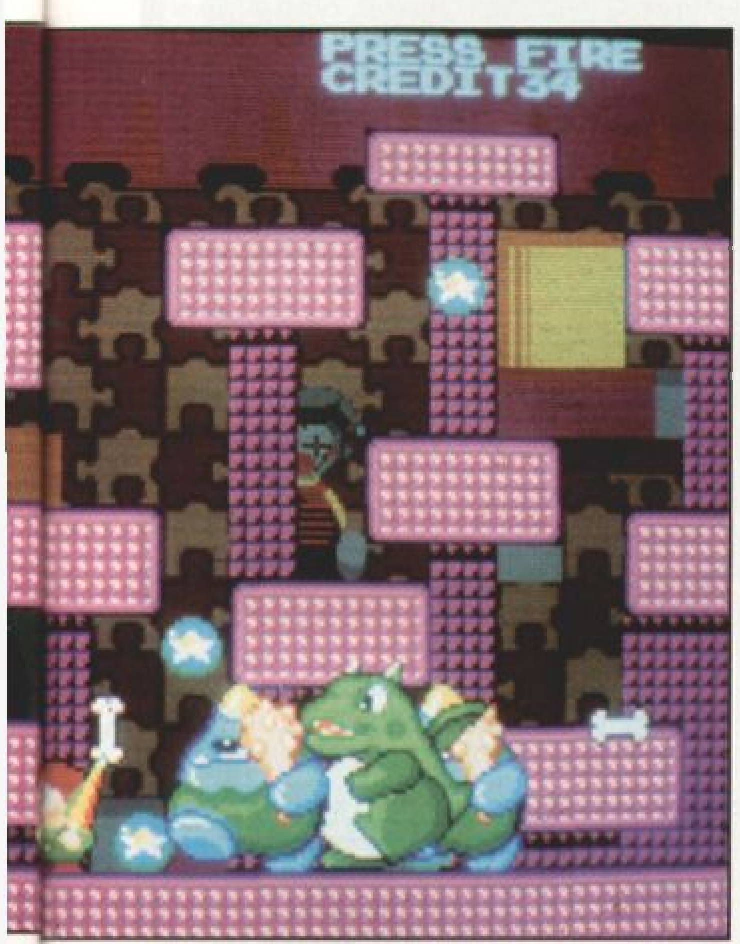
The first outing of the series, Bubble Bobble, had - for no good reason - our two heroes transformed into brontosauruses for the duration of the game. The aim was to rid each screen of baddies by ensnaring them in bubbles and then bursting the bubbles to collect bonus fruit. Many professed Bubble Bobble was a bit of a breakthrough and marked the return to good old fashioned games playing values. Others pointed out that despite its enjoyable two-player angle it had atrocious graphics and never really progressed, simply becoming harder and harder and leaving the player thoroughly unsatisfied.



Ah, they may look right smart treat dreamy homestyle in a non-moving position, but when they move about, the graphics in Parasol Stars make for a most disconcerting visual experience. It's not that they're flicky or even badly animated, but there are just so many colours all over the top of each other that it's just a bit much. However, if you've been brought up to enjoy the opening credits of the Chart Show, you'll feel right at home.

STARS





Rainbow Islands, however, was a marked improvement. Back in their human form, Bub and Bob were challenged with restoring colour to a suite of islands robbed of hue by the Prince of Darkness. This was a far more enjoyable affair, with Bub and Bob armed with magic abilities enabling them to form solid rainbows at will. The rainbows could be used both to capture baddies and climb up the screens, making for a rather pleasing visual experience. The downside here, however, was that there was no simultaneous two-player mode.

The fact that Parasol Stars promises to be a blend of both Bubble Bobble and Rainbow Islands makes it an intriguing prospect if nothing else.

So the fact that Parasol Stars promises to be a blend of both Bubble Bobble and Rainbow Islands makes it an intriguing prospect if nothing else.

The common thread running through all of Bub and Bob's adventures is the collection of secret bonuses. Throwing captured monsters into certain areas of the screen will reveal points or fruit. Performing other permutations of moves with the fruit will yield yet more points. However, points are not vital to the completion of each level; they're just there for the player who wants to explore. It's probably this factor more than any other which turned off potential coin-op players. Once your cash is ticking away, the tendency (certainly amongst goal-driven British players) is to complete each screen. We generally don't have the patience to explore levels we've already finished. As a result, lots of Brits simply couldn't really see the point. When playing the game in a home environment, however, there's more incentive to understand the game dynamics and find those hidden extras.

And there's hidden extras a plenty in Parasol Stars. Hidden doors lead through to bonus worlds. Hidden switches reveal previously invisible lines of fruit. And it's all there to be discovered for the player with the inclination to look.

In their bid to remove the mad warrior Chaostikahn and his menacing monsters from the universe, Bub and Bob must visit eight planets; destroying enemies peculiar to each and thus restoring colour and happiness. Each planet is broken down into seven levels, with the obligatory end of world guardian marauding around the final screen.

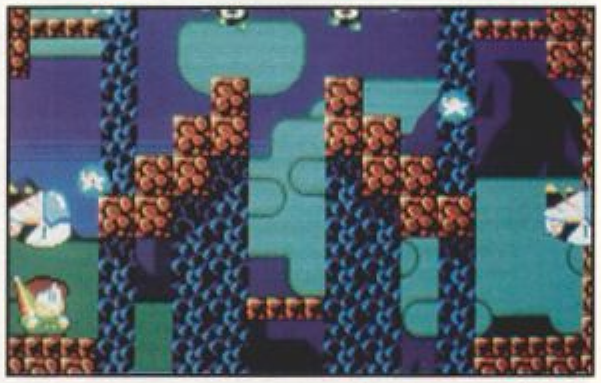
And with what fearsome weapons from the Bubble arsenal have Bub and Bob been equipped? A pair of parasols, of course. While they may be weedy little bits of cloth that turn inside out with the slightest gust here on Earth, they're pretty handy in the further flung areas of the universe. The parasols are used in two distinct ways. The first is simply to shield the player from monsters. Holding the joystick down and pressing fire will raise the parasol, offering protection from an assault from above. Pressing fire while the joystick points in another direction will bring on an enemy-swiping flourish.

The second method involves more patience but can produce devastating results. Throughout most screens, magic droplets drip from the ceilings. The droplets can be caught on the parasol and then fired off left or right, allowing the player to pick off enemies at a distance. Alternatively, the player can build up a store of up to five droplets and then use them to unleash a massive bolt of baddie-bashing energy, taking the form of waterfall or enormous lightning bolt depending on the form of droplets being used.

▶58

compare & contrast

A three-way C&C this time. Rainbow Islands was by far the more popular of the Bub & Bob games, even though it didn't boast the excellent two-player japes available in Bubble Bobble. So what elements the two mave made it through to Parasol Stars? The crazy scoring system is still the same, with multiple bonuses etc. But the rainbows are gone. Instead, Bub and Bob use their brollies in much the same way as they blew bubbles in the first game. And the goal of reaching the top of the screen in Islands has been replaced by a more straightforward (and in my opinion, less rewarding) aim of clearing the screen of baddies. Parasol Stars may well win the day in your opinion, but Rainbow Islands still snatches it for me.



PARASOL STARS

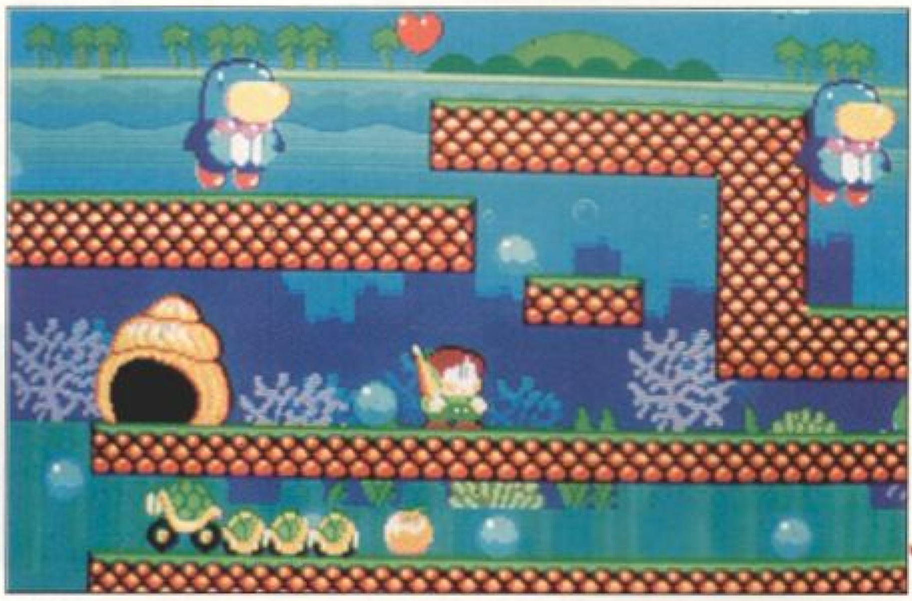
AND I THINK TO MYSELF, WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD.

Ah, life is sweet. The birds sing in the trees and the sun shines down on all of God's children. Yes. Life on Earth is very nice. But in the worlds of Bub and Bob things are not very nice at all. Not at the moment they're not, anyway. And why are things not especially pleasant in the land of our favourite bug-eyed heroes? Because that bleeding Chaostikahn has gone and stolen all the colours from eight different worlds, and put all the creatures of each world under a spooky spell. Now beautiful instruments of joy and fun like pianos and plants and one-armed bandits have been twisted into grizzly mutants of their former selves, trained to maim and kill. Something must be done!

But where to start? Well, you'll start at World 1 and like it, since there's no option in the game to skip from one to another, or even preset your route. And there are stages in the game which are so tough, we doubt if you'll be enjoying them on your Amiga monitor for some time yet. So why not enjoy them in, if you will, "print", in our handy easy-to-follow guide to the content and style of each world. We hope you enjoy it.

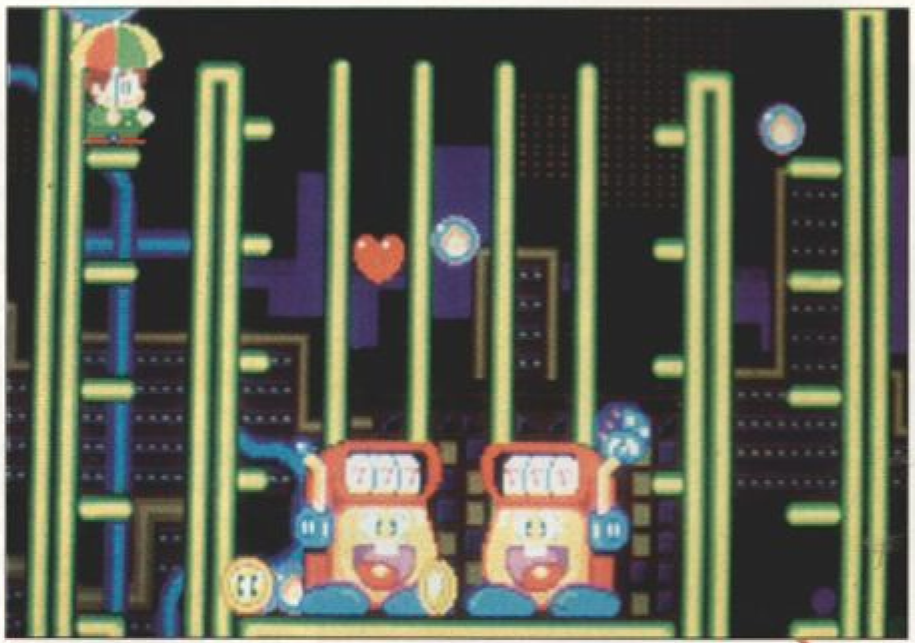
World 3 - Ocean World

Gloop! Hermit crabs, seals and penguins all attack Bub and Bob once they've crawled out from the shell on the left edge of the middle platform. Do for the shell and you'll be laughing. Collect the heart for an extra life.



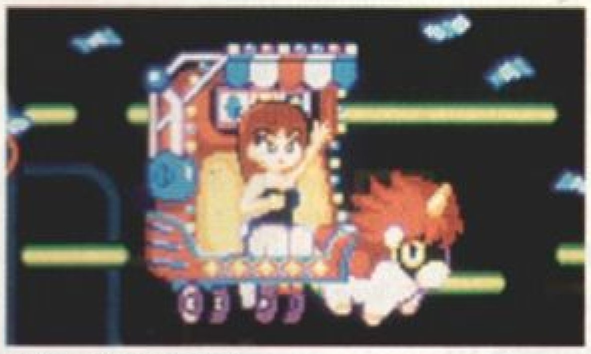
World 5 - Casino World

Oooh! A fiendish set up if ever there was one. Look at all those Narrow, narrow platforms, and look at those fiendish, scheming one-armed bandits. What's called for here is a hefty build up of water droplets and a good old flush to sort them out.



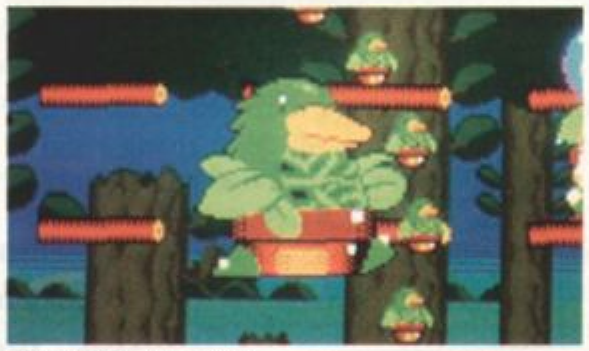
IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT...

...And I feel fine. Yes indeed. With its eight worlds, Parasol Stars has a fair fist-ful of end of world meanies to combat. And some of them are SO hard to kill, they'll make your blood boil. But what is the socio-economic significance of these creatures. I mean, just where are they coming from, guy? We think it's important to know. So journey with us as we proudly present: The Pseud's Guide To The Ends of The Worlds



End Of The World 5

Hmm. Fascinating! A rancid mix of Japanese and American cultures, the girl is throwing money away like the mad throw-away culture of America while being pulled by a My Little Pony. The pony clearly represents the struggle of post-war Japan to pull itself away from loss and a new future inventing portable stereos. An allegorical marvel.

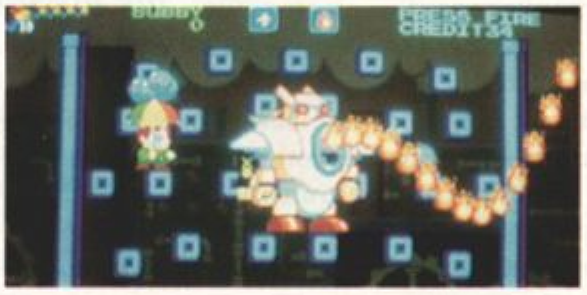


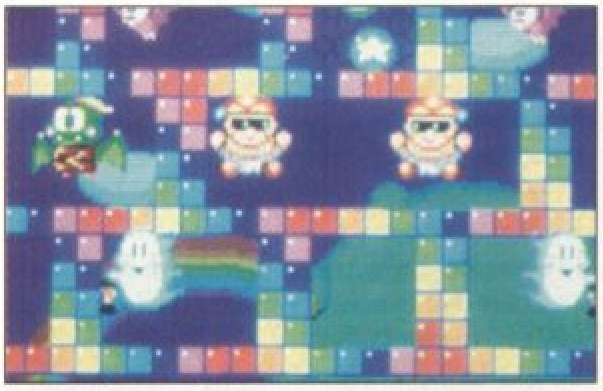
End Of The World 2

Yes. The rainforests are in a terrible state, and nowhere is it better represented than here, with an enormous plant-thing fighting back at man after years of being a passive victim to our terrible waste. Anyone who plays this world will surely think twice before chopping down any more innocent vegetation.

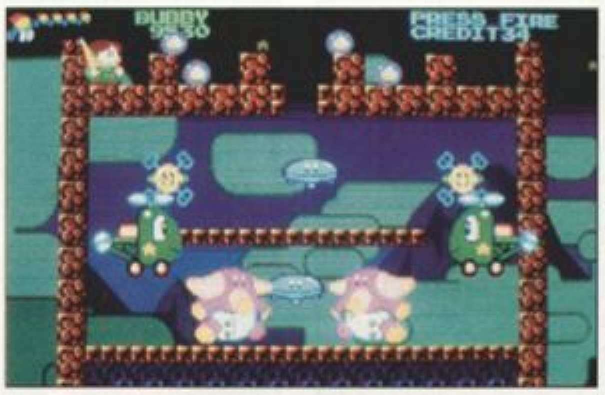
End Of The World 4

Possibly the most poignant computer image in the world today. What a turning of the tables. A big robot, obviously representing all the defunct old machinery spewed out into the world comes back to haunt us. What a telling vision for today's society.

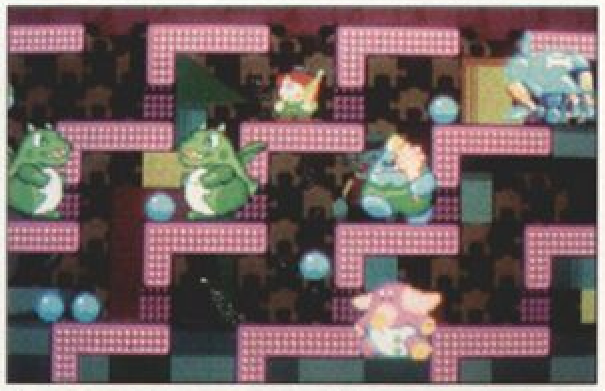




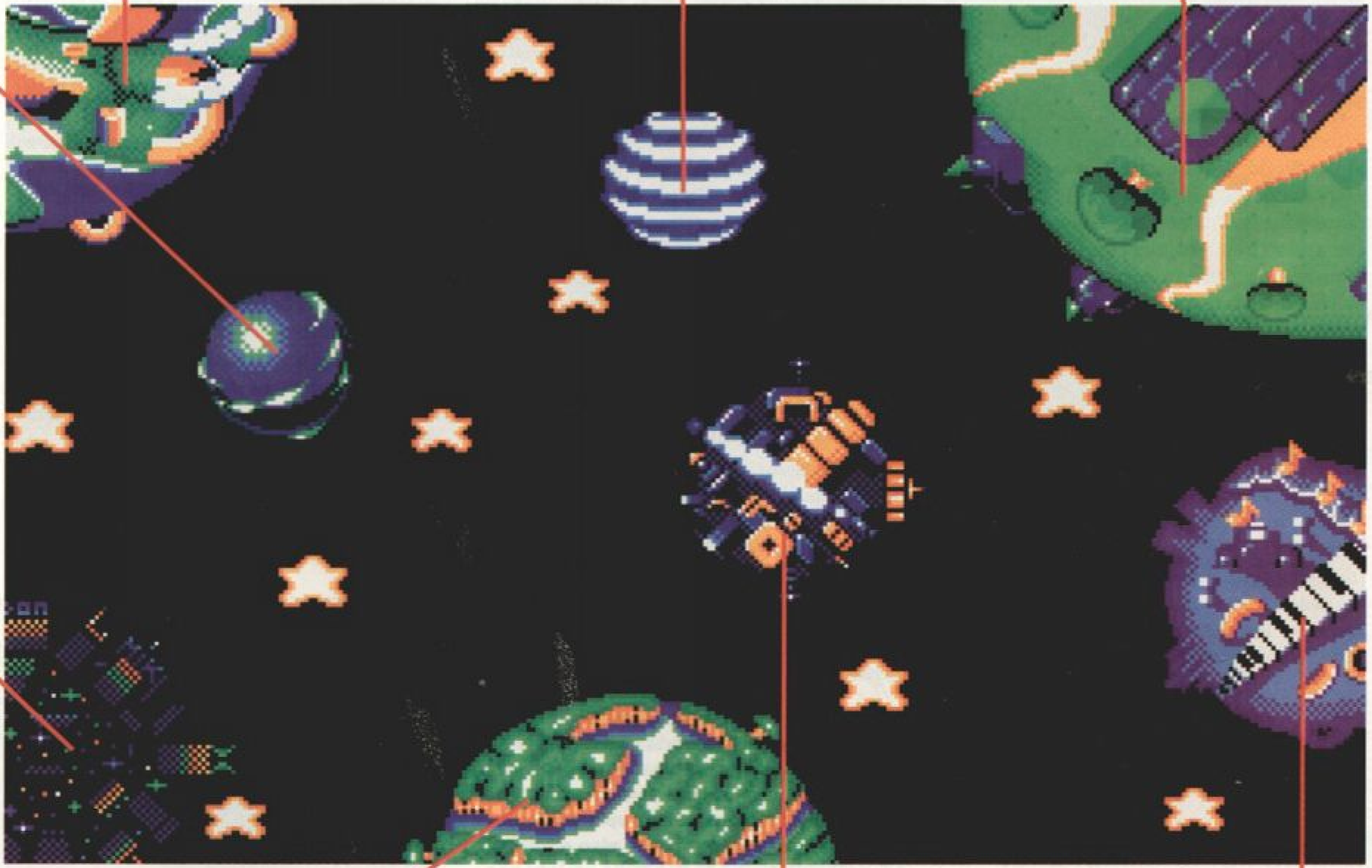
World 8 - Rainbow World
As Bub and Bob's quest finally draws to an end. Having restored colour to all the other seven planets, they've got an easy final stretch here on Rainbow World. But will the evil Chaostikahn get there first? And have Bub and Bob really explored all the mysterious places in the universe..?

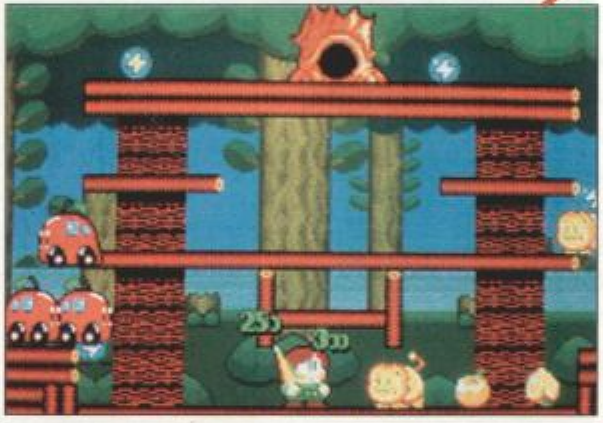


World 6 - Cloud World
Bub and Bob must battle all manner of aerial assailants up here in the skies. A whole batch of new disciplines must be learnt in order to cope with the attacks from above and below. Planes, helicopter and satellites are all on the rampage!

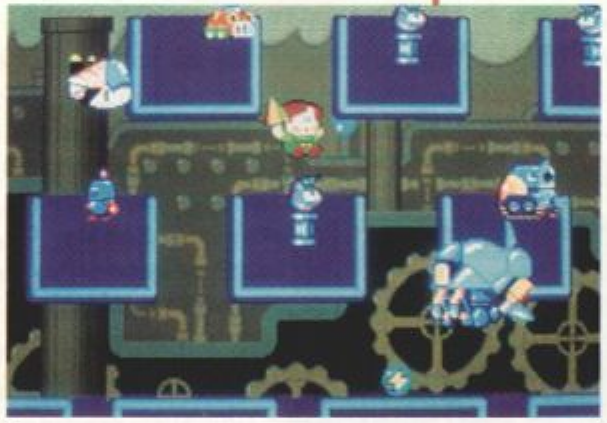


World 7 - Giant World
And you thought the other levels were tough. Forced into a corner (the top right corner of the universe, to be precise) Chaostikahn summons his most powerful and fearsome monsters to attack Bub and Bob. Witness the terrifying fat dragons and those pink thinks with the ears. Oooh!

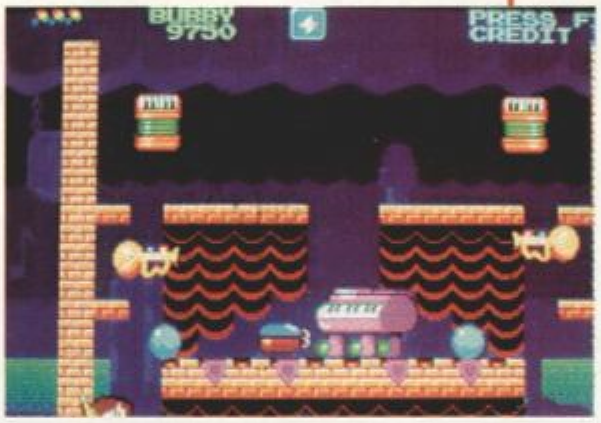




World 2 - Woodland World
Aieee, Treestumps! Yes. They may only be mildly infuriating and unsightly here on Earth, but in Bubble Bobble land, treestumps are the worst enemies of Bub and Bob. It's from the stumps, you see, that all the baddies come. Destroy the stump and life will be a lot easier.

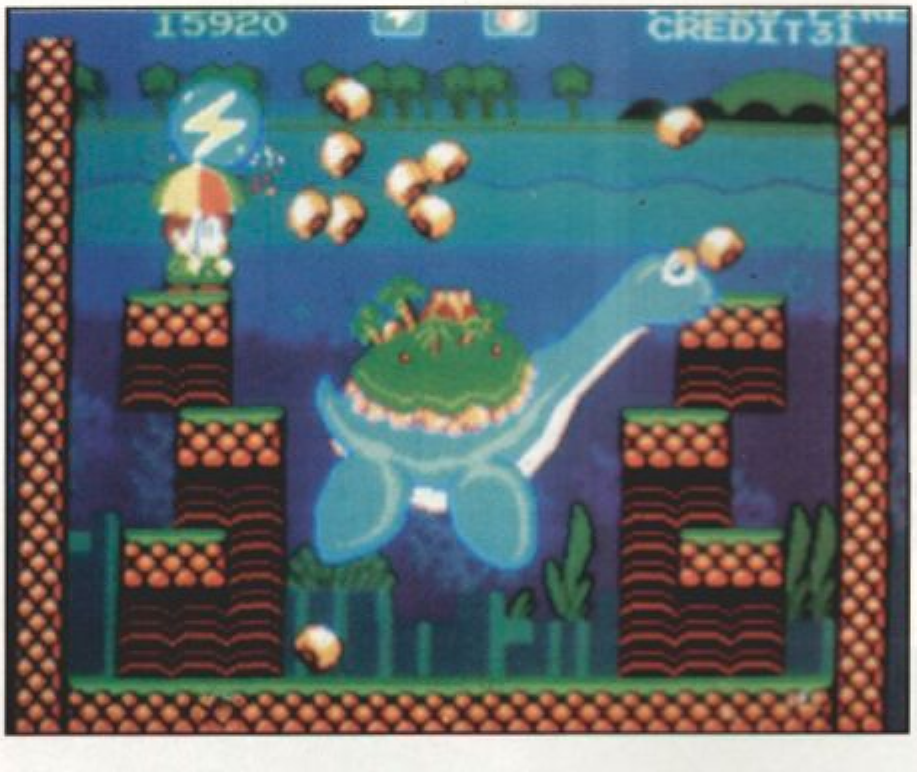


World 4 - Machine World
"Machinery gone mad" say the instructions, and they're not kidding! Dastardly aircraft and other malevolent machines form wicked attack waves to ensnare Bub and Bob. Get to the top of the screen as soon as possible and rain down with rust-inducing droplets.



World 1 - Music World
If music be the food of love, get that bleeding piano with one of your lightning bolts! The honking horns and the squooshing accordians don't actually make for much of a threat to Bub and Bob's existence. A nice way to begin the quest and get used to the controls.

PARASOL STARS



They may look very different, but most of the worlds can be handled in similar fashions. Witness Bob's masterful brolly technique which will deal successfully with both the one-man-band and the dinosaur with the island on his back.

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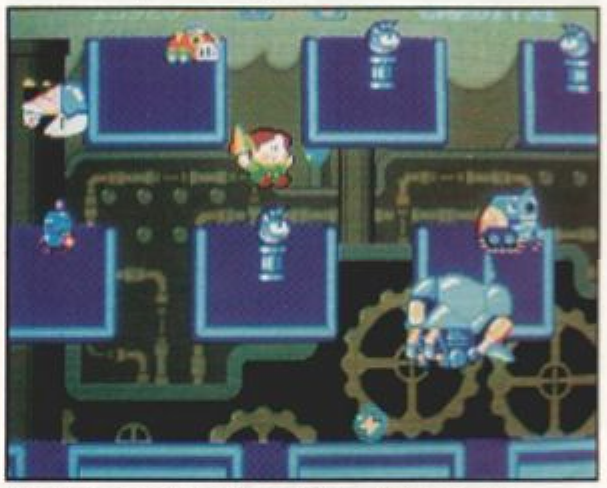
So, with parasols in their hands and goodness in their hearts, Bub and Bob travel to mission one; Music World. While the baddies are different for each world, the pattern of events is largely the same. That is; Bub and Bob fly in on their parasols and sit in the bottom corners of the screen. Monsters will then explode out from a central position on the screen into their appropriate start positions. In the first world, of course, everything has a musical theme.

As explained earlier, actually completing most of the screens isn't particularly difficult. Instead it's completing the screens well and exposing and collecting the myriad of secret bonuses which is where the real skill lies.

The scoring system seems rather complicated at first, but has a logical foundation. Each bit of fruit lying around on the level will score between ten and 10,000 points. The big fruits will all score 100,000. In order for the player to earn points from baddie-bashing alone, the monsters need to be thrown against each other when they are paralysed (indicated by them becoming green or blue). 2000 points is awarded for the first monster destroyed this way, and then 4000, 8000 and so on, doubling right up to 100,000 if the player manages to destroy an entire line of seven or more monsters in one go. Extra credits can also be obtained by collecting the 100 coin.



Lookatemgo! You'll need to be quick on your feet to avoid becoming "Super Drunk" here in Machine World. Falling off the bottom of the screen allows access to the areas at the top. Crazy!

Like Bubble Bobble, Parasol Stars works best as a two player game. Even on the earlier levels which are filled with relatively feeble bad guys, life is a whole lot easier when the players are working well together. At the end of some levels, when the guardians become really difficult, a solo battle is not really worth considering.

But there is a price to pay for teaming up. Receiving a hit from a stray droplet or even a careless flurry of a parasol will result in either Bub or Bob being flung across the screen. Often this will result in a number of monsters being bashed of bonuses being revealed. Devious players can, of course, fling their companion around intentionally, but shouldn't expect much co-operation when it comes to the end of the level.

Each stage is effectively "cleared" once all the monsters have been knocked off. The players then have a limited amount of time to clear up any straggling bits of fruit before they are returned to their bottom-corner positions and whisked away in a rather jarring scroll to the next stage.

And so it goes on until seven stages have been completed and the players prepare to do battle with the obligatory end of world fiend.

It's here that Parasol Stars makes one of its slips. Some of the end of world guardians, especially the girl being drawn along in a carriage by a demented My Little Pony lookalike take SO many hits before they will finally go away that the only real facet of the player's ability being tested is his patience.

A limited number of continues are available, but using one in the midst of a battle with the guardians will replenish half of the guardian's strength. The best policy by far is to do battle with the guardians for as long as one player can hold out and then for which ever player is left to continue the fight alone.

The eventual vanquishing of the guardian will result in a cut back to the view of all the worlds, with a miniature Bub and Bob swooshing away from the recently coloured world off to another grey one. It's a shame that the worlds have to be completed in a particular order, and there's no option to select the one the player fancies next, but there you go. Another omission is a password system. Once the game is over, there's no way to skip through to the stage last attained. Instead, every level must be played again. Players will have to decide for themselves how appealing a prospect this is.

Graphically, Parasol Stars is a paradox. Stationary, it looks like an absolute dream, with beautifully coloured monsters sitting menacing-

Amiga Version

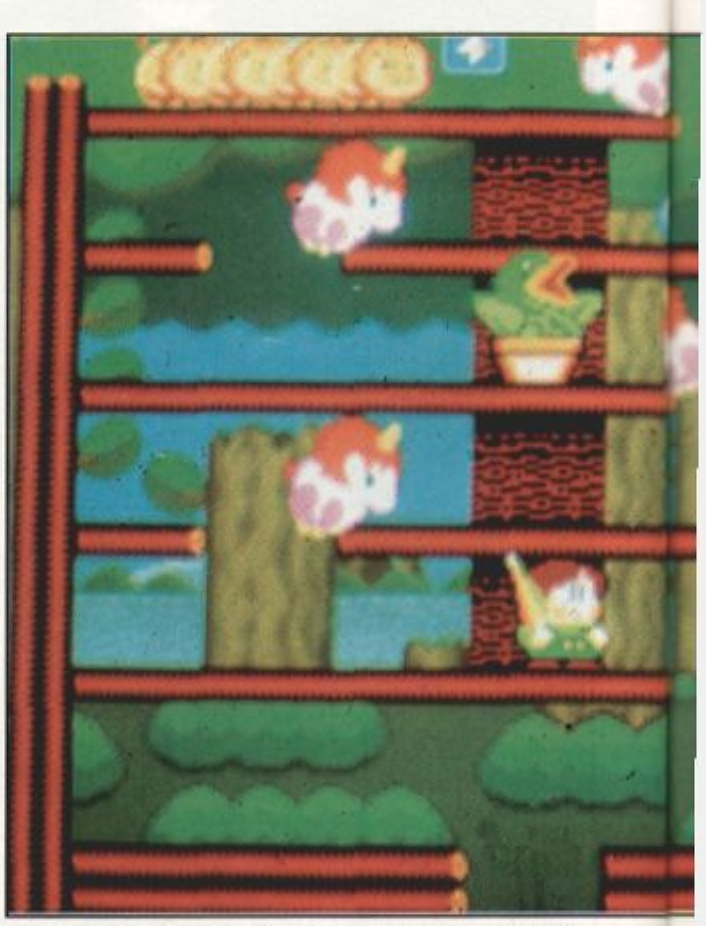
No surprises here. The graphics are colourful and the action is fast and frenetic. However, Parasol Stars has a peculiar graphic style. All thoughts of the player's poor little eyes seem to have been set aside in the name of more and more colours. The animations of the monsters spinning around once they've been bashed is also a bit limited, probably owing to the huge variety necessary. In all, it's a game you need to make allowances for.

ST Version

Not quite as smooth and boasting slightly fewer colours, the ST version of Bubble Bobble may find it tough to reconcile the failings inherent in the original game when disarmed of the Amiga's best features; lots of speed and colour. Watch the pinks for a final verdict.

PC Version

Alas and alack. Bub and Bob will be blowing no bubbles on the IBM. Boo.



My word! Look at those My Little Pony fellas! As they hare back and forth across Woodland world, Bub would be wise to use the bottom-to-top technique here too in order to gain that all important height advantage.

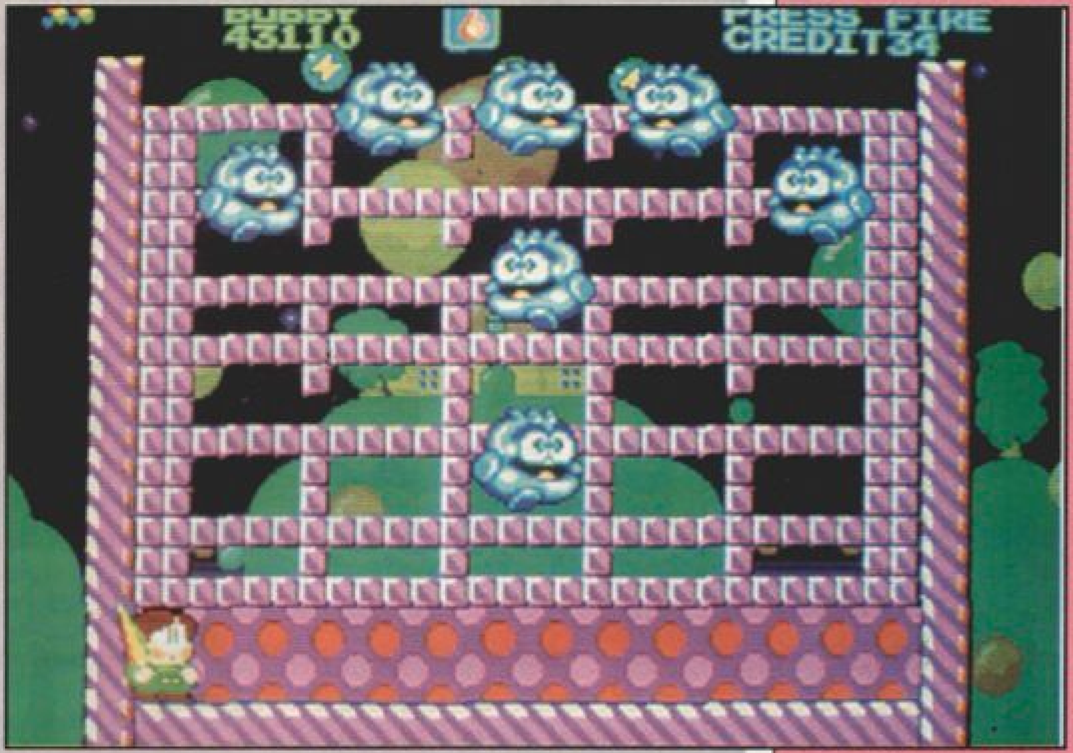
LISTEN, DO YOU WANT TO KNOW A SECRET..?

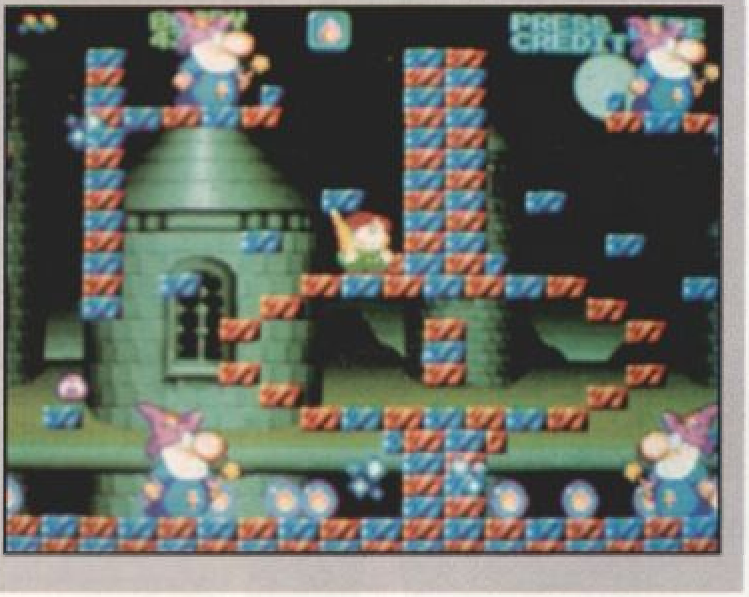
Secrets, eh? They're what life is all about. Those precious little nuggets of information known only to a select few people. What a delicious position to hold - the owner of a secret.

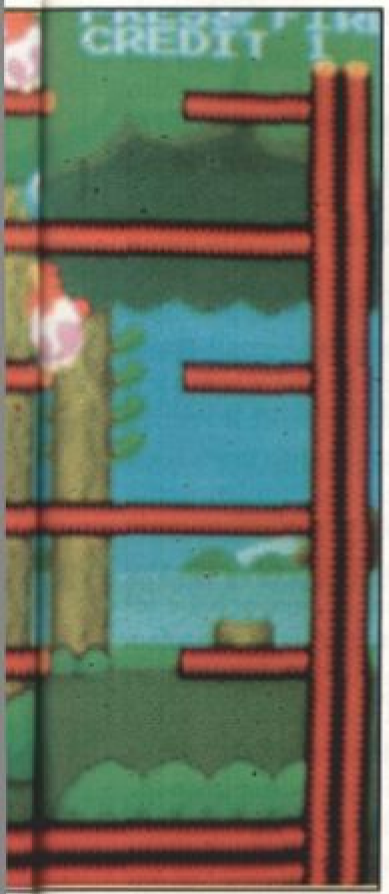
By this token, the folks up at Ocean are in a doubly super situation, knowing where TWO completely so-secret-if-you-didn't-know-where-to-look-you'd-miss-them worlds can be found in the game that they are already calling "Parasol Stars". The worlds can be accessed from within other worlds by simply falling through secret doors. Revealing the doors, of course, is another matter.

The first world takes the form of a true nostalgia trip, whooshing the players back to Bubble Bobble land where they can play a miniature version of the heroes' very first outing.

The second - the Most Secret World - is one constructed entirely from the minds of the roistering boys at Ocean, and incorporates all *their* favourite elements of the Bub and Bob phenomenon.







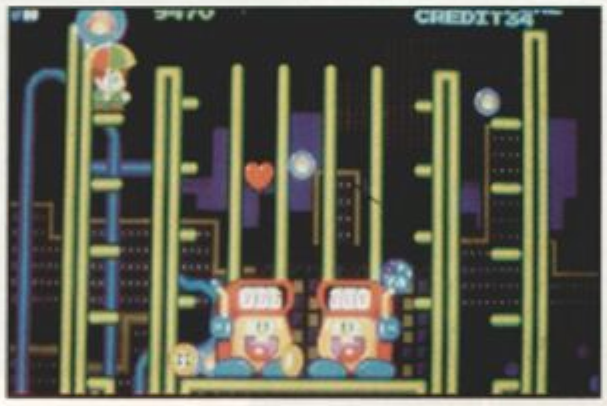
ly atop their ledges and pieces of fruit glinting appetisingly in the far reaches of the screen. However when it all moves, it's another matter. The variety and richness of the colours become an assault on the senses and the volume of objects needing animation pares the frames for each right down. Although many hundred times better than Bubble Bobble, Parasol Stars is still a long way short of perfect.

Of the previous two titles, Parasol Stars is probably closer to Bubble Bobble. As a two-player game it works well, but solo it doesn't. The graphics are a lot better, but the game really isn't about the way it looks. There are lots of worlds to complete, but the game is more about amassing scores than finishing levels. However, the Bubble Bobble series is nothing if not original, and there's enough of a learning curve for the player to scale simply to fully understand how to control Bub and Bob properly and work out the rules of their environment to make it an amusing though complicated affair.

It certainly isn't a game for all tastes, and players used to or fond of games where the difficulty is more evenly paced and the eventual score doesn't really matter would be well advised to consider the outlay carefully. However, fans of the series and in particular those players lucky enough to have played the PC Engine version will know exactly what to expect, and won't be disappointed. And I'm sure such folks will be only too pleased to discover that players heroic enough to reach the rather excellent end sequence will receive an invitation to "Watch out for Bubble Bobble IV!". Yum.

Some of the end of world guardians take SO many hits before they die that the only real facet of the player's ability being tested is his patience.

● Jim Douglas

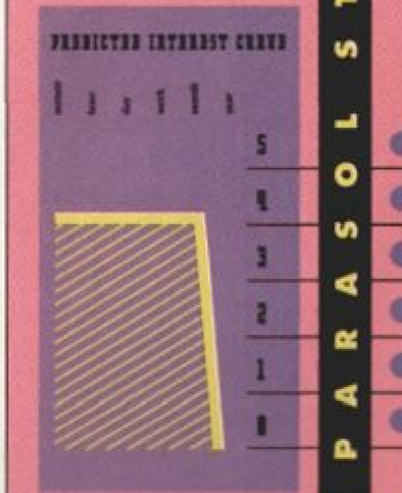


Very colourful. Lots of levels. Good team-up option.	Solo play a bit of a waste of time. Very tough In motion, it looks like an explosion in a Fuzzy Felt factory.

850 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
6	3	6	8

Phew! Here's an up & downer if ever there was one. Initial excitement is provided, largely, by the anticipation of playing a game of which the player really hasn't a clue what to expect. After play of about an hour, *however, the novelty has* worn off somewhat and it becomes clear that some careful attention to scoring patterns and a dedicated search for secret rooms is necessary in order to extract the most fun from the game. Whether the player has the inclination to play in such a vigorous manner is, I suspect, a matter of personal taste.



PARASOL STARS RATINGS

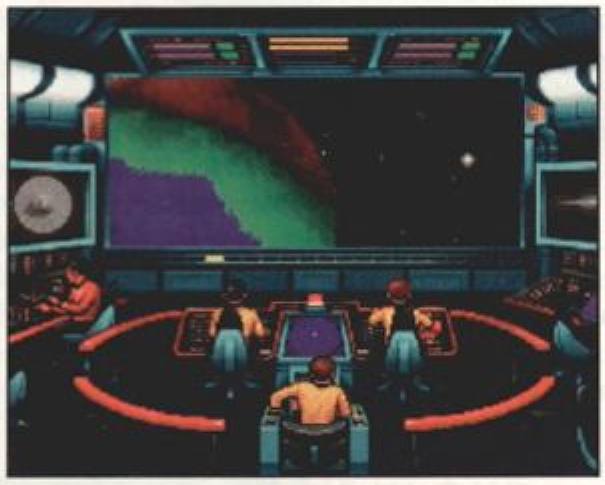
Genre Adventure/Arcade Blast
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Interplay
Price £34.99

STAR TREK
The 25th Anniversary

Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise, its five-year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations. To boldly go where no man has gone before...

It's been exactly 25 years since the USS Enterprise first left space dock in search of those new worlds and life-forms, and though Kirk, Spock, Bones, Scotty and the rest of the crew may get fatter and more in need of nylon hair furnishings with each successive adventure, the perennial success of Gene Roddenberry's sci-fi masterpiece proves that you can't keep a good idea down. After all, few SF sagas are so prolific they can claim to be a genre all of their own. Since Star Trek's inception there have been 70-odd episodes, a cartoon series, a so-so spin-off series (The Next Generation, now in its umpteenth season) and, as of this month, six blockbusting feature films.

Though younger fans will know Star Trek only from the movies, true Trekkies know that the real magic is to be found in the original TV series. Okay, so the Enterprise did look a bit like a die-cast model back then, and maybe the costumes, sets and special effects were all highly dodgy, but that's part of what made it so much FUN! Kirk's constantly-quizzical expression and flings with green alien women, the never-ending verbal sparring between Spock and McCoy, Uhura's impossibly-short skirts, Scotty screaming "The engines cannae take nae more, Cap'n!"... it's arguable that the show's ever-prevailant camp atmosphere is what lifted it out of the ordinary and into the annals of true greatness.



Travel through space can be a hazardous process for those captains not fully versed in the ways of the space-lanes. Here, Kirk is doing just fine, but jaunting off just for fun can lead to all an unpleasant bout of the Klingons.

It's suitable, then, that the game that's been released to celebrate Star Trek's official quarter-century birthday should be based not on the more serious, sophisticated movies, but those original cheap'n'cheerful TV episodes. This choice of subject matter comes as no surprise. What is surprising is the incredible authenticity with which producers Interplay have managed to capture the show's look, feel and message.

Being careful not to make the same mistakes made by previous Star Trek games (Firebird's effort being a particularly painful memory), Interplay has worked hard to to present Star Trek as authentically as possible within a playable game structure. The result is one that, on paper, doesn't sound too inspiring, but on screen works brilliantly. Primarily, it's an icon-driven graphic adventure presented in the same style as a Lucasfilm or Sierra product, but with a liberal sprinkling of 3D space-combat arcade action in the Wing Commander vein. Granted, it sounds very chalk-and-cheesish, but it works a whole lot better than you're thinking.

The game is presented not as one single entity or storyline, but as a collection of small, independent storylines in the form of TV episodes. It's probably the game's single most inventive aspect, both in terms of gameplay (it's never been done before) and as a device for emulating the feel of the show. What you're getting here is effectively a whole season of Star Trek, with each storyline based vaguely on real episodes. It's a lot like the series in the sense that, though the plots change, the format remains much the same from episode to episode. An initial flypast of the Enterprise accompanies the episode title, and then it's onto the bridge for either a reading from the Captain's log or a message from Starfleet Command to set up the story. In true Star Trek fashion, very little is known about a mission initially (you're normally ordered to visit a certain planet just to investigate strange goings-on or something equally vague), and what's really happening only becomes apparent as the plot unfolds.

Apart from in combat, Kirk's control of the Enterprise is limited. Everything is operated semi-automatically from the bridge, via the various crew members. Mr Sulu handles shield control and planet orbiting, Chekov looks after weapons and warp engines, Uhura does communications and first officer Spock is an all-round helpful bloke, offering scientific background and sound advice. Though everyone is seated as they should be, die-hard Trekkies may be a little miffed to see that Scotty now sits on the bridge as well. Authenticity dictates that he should be getting his hands dirty in the engine room somewhere, but in order to contain everything within the bridge, he handles damage control from a computer console to Kirk's left.

The game is presented not as one single entity or storyline, but as a collection of small, independent storylines in the form of TV episodes. It's probably the game's single most inventive aspect, both in terms of gameplay and as a device for emulating the feel of the show.

Having an experienced bridge crew means that the player, as Kirk, has very little to do in peacetime besides make basic decisions. Just click on a planet via Chekov and the warp engines do the rest. Chances are, however, that when the Enterprise arrives at its destination, the situation will hot up. The Klingons, Romulans and Elasi pirates all do their bit as the bad guys from mission to mission, and when an enemy ship is confronted there may be no choice but to engage in combat. You know what these Klingons are like - open fire first, talk later.

Knowing the routine is the key to success in stellar combat. Shields are the first order of the day (any hit on the Enterprise is crippling without them), and once Chekov fires up the weapons you're ready to rock and roll. Combat takes place via the giant viewscreen at the front of the bridge, with the Enterprise steered and weapons aimed by a set of miniature crosshairs. The mouse buttons give access to phasers (energy-consuming but fast and accurate) and photon torpedoes (efficient and powerful but slow and tricky to aim), which are fired as the target(s) streak past. Generally, enemy ships move quickly and keep their distance, so the trick is to fire well ahead of them in the direction they're moving. Estimating distance and speed so that your shot and its target will end up in the same place at the same time is tricky, but very satisfying when it works.

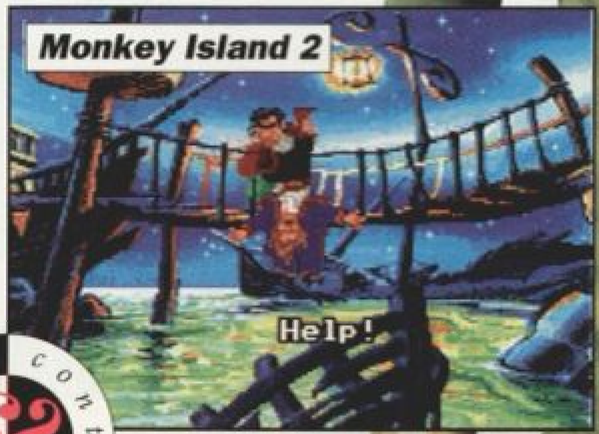
There's very little strategy or tactical element to Star Trek's combat - it's basically a question of knocking out the enemy before his shots can cause too much damage to the Enterprise. The shields provide an adequate buffer, absorbing the first dozen or so hits, but if you can't get a quick kill, further enemy shots will damage the ship's sys-

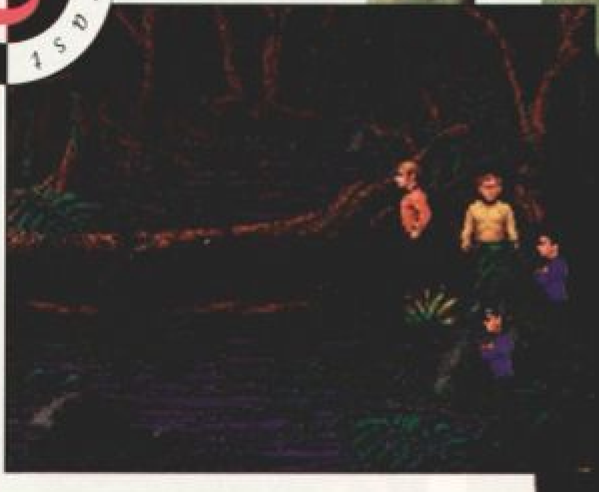
▶64

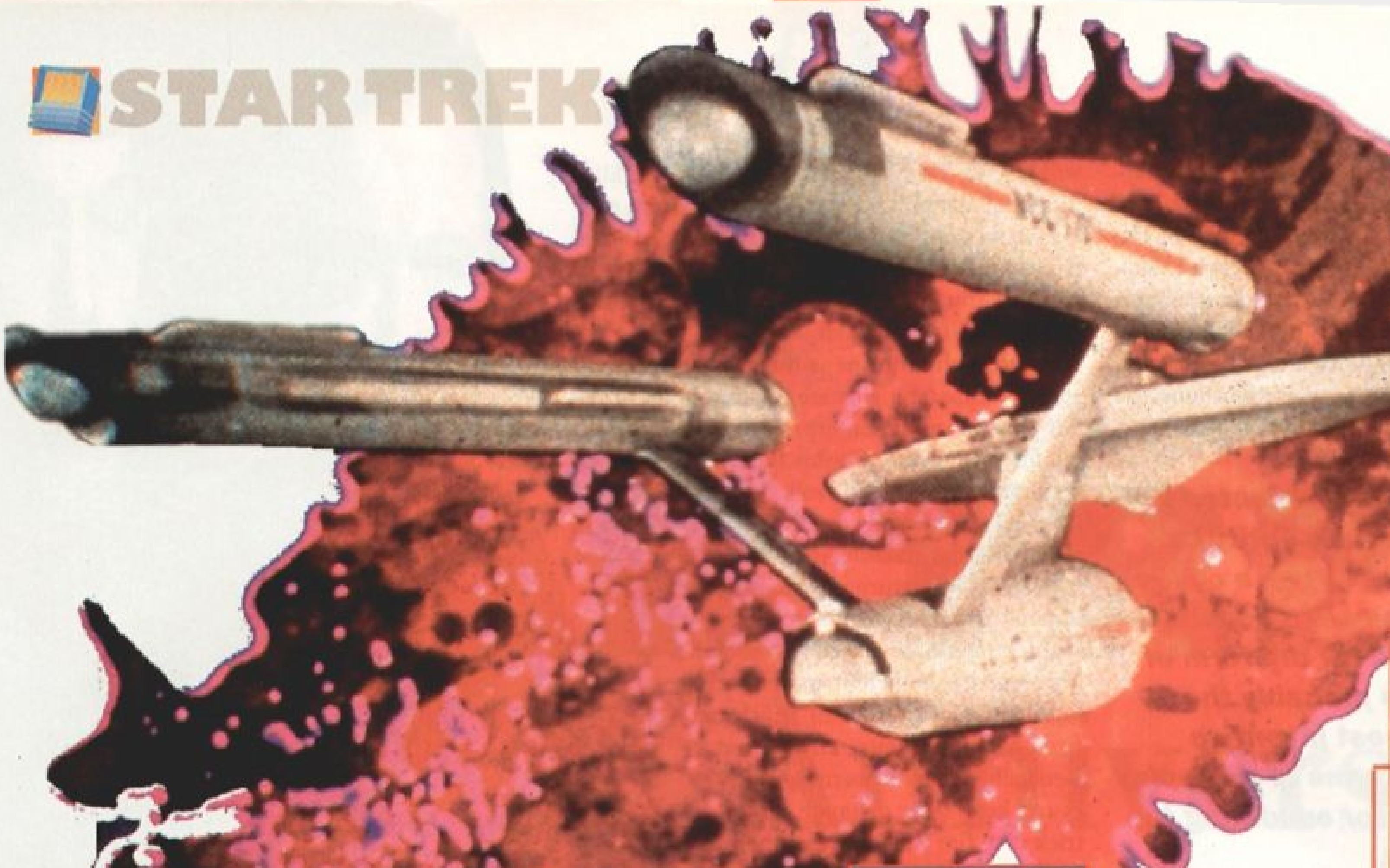
compare & contrast

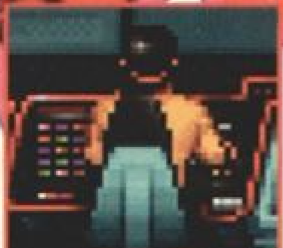
It's was a very close-run thing, but Monkey Island 2 narrowly holds on to its ACE Adventure Benchmark. In my mind at least, Star Trek is by far the more innovative product with its individual episodes and multi-character control, and the awesome presentation means it pips Lucasfilm's effort in the atmosphere stakes too. In the puzzle stakes, the individual posers are of about the same quality, although Star Trek's episodic format means the puzzles have to be self-contained and are somewhat less elaborate as a result. Unfortunately, the rather short number of missions is a serious consideration, and the end result is that Monkey Island 2 is likely to offer the serious adventurer a lot more enjoyment in the long term.

Monkey Island 2

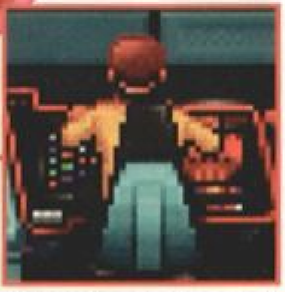








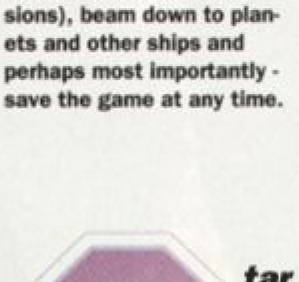
Mister Sulu has the important job of controlling deflector shields, and is also responsible for putting the Enterprise in orbit around planets - transporters only work when in orbit due to their limited range.



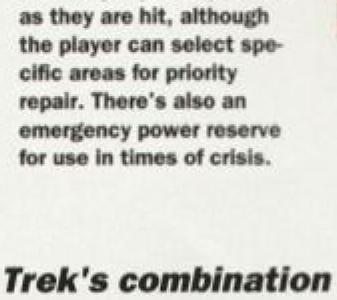
Chekov is a navigation and weapons man. The Enterprise travels by means of the player selecting a planet from his galactic map. It's also his job to arm phasers and torpedoes prior to combat.

THE BRIDGE

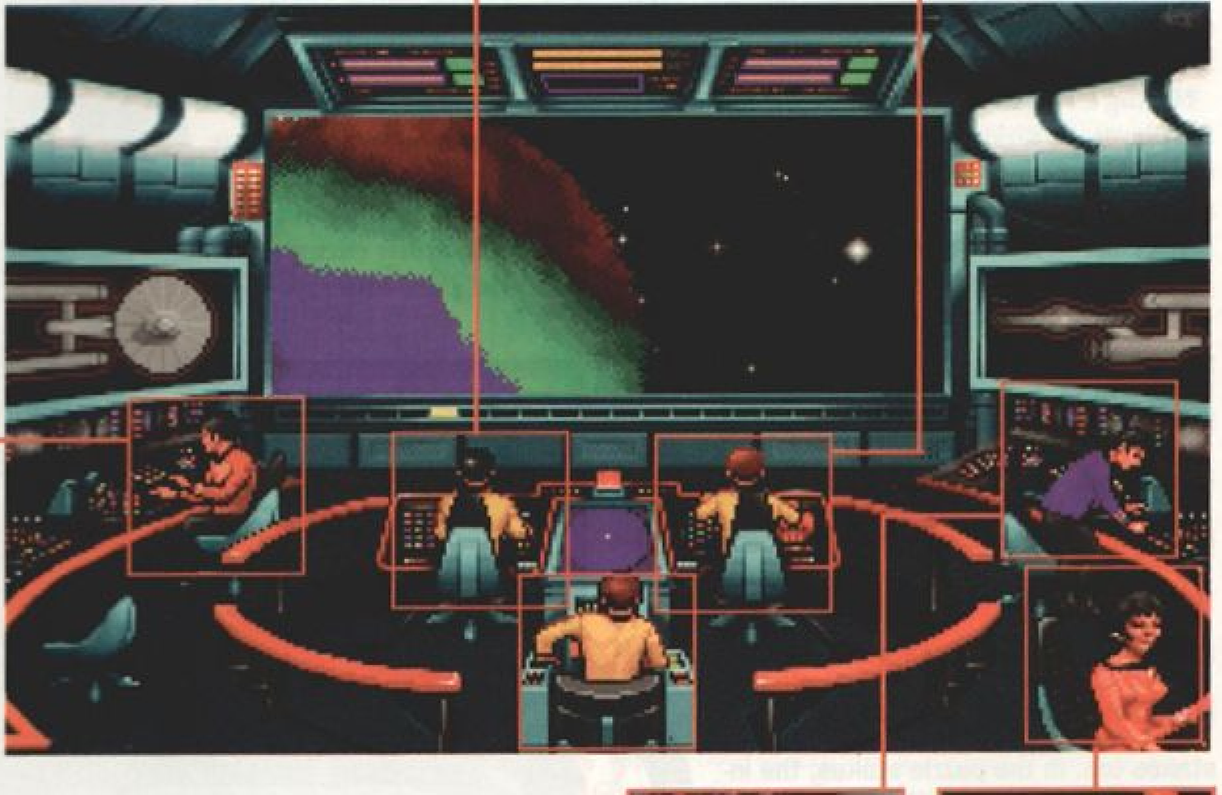
This is where it all happens. From here the player issues commands to his crew (via Captain Kirk, of course) and partakes in combat with other vessels. Apart from the main sensor screen, a wealth of information is available - power and speed readings appear above the main screen, while damage displays are situated to the far left and right. Perhaps the most important instrument is the radar, used for locating enemy ships not in visual range.

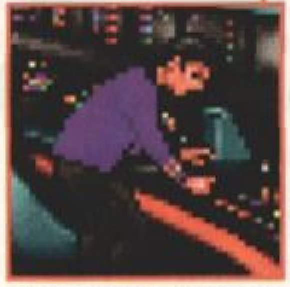


By selecting Kirk, the player can review the Captain's Log (showing reports on previous missions), beam down to planets and other ships and perhaps most importantly - save the game at any time.

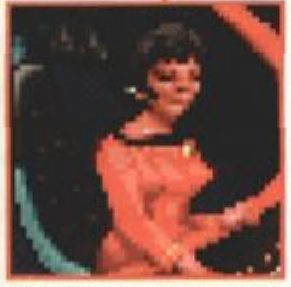


Scotty's job is to control damage to the Enterprise during combat. He automatically repairs systems as they are hit, although the player can select specific areas for priority repair. There's also an emergency power reserve for use in times of crisis.



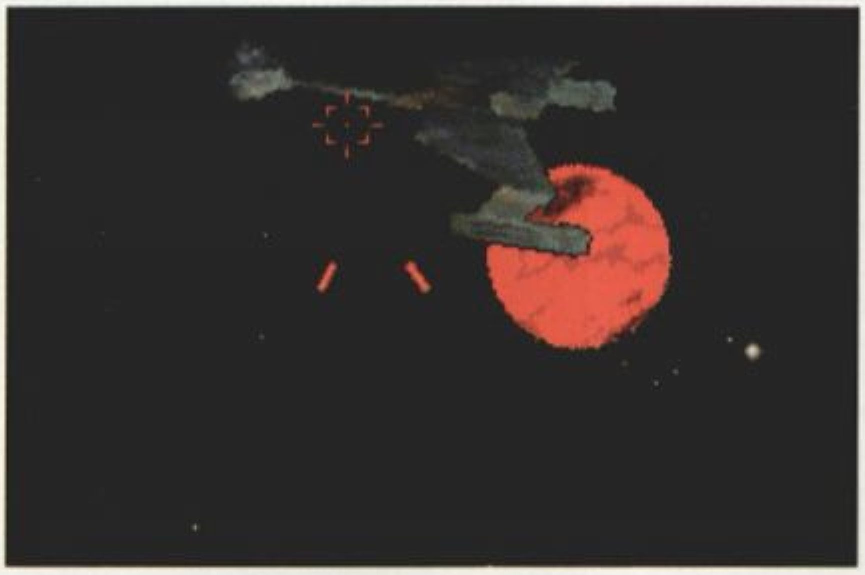


Although he has no specific task, Spock can give Kirk expert advice on a particular subject or situation at all times. His logical insight can be invaluable. The player can also access Spock's computer directly, for raw data on a chosen topic.



Uhura handles communication to and from the Enterprise - all incoming messages go through her. She can hail ships and planets, as well as transmit messages and other data.

Star Trek's combination of diverse arcade and adventure segments requires the player to develop a wide variety of skills, from marksmanship to lateral thinking. Members of the crew are always on hand to help out, but in the end it's up to Kirk toget results - whoever said commanding a starship was easy?

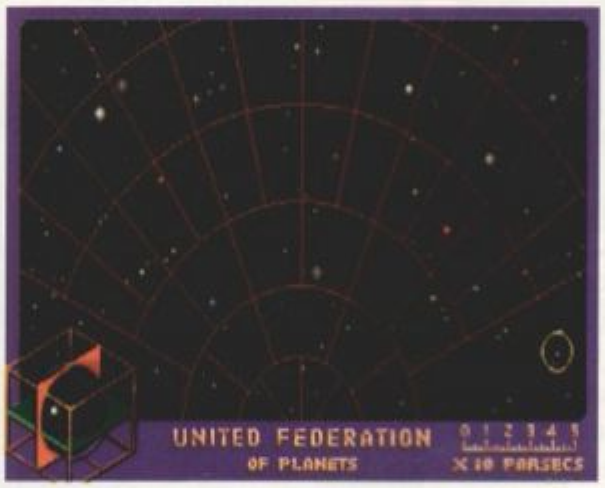


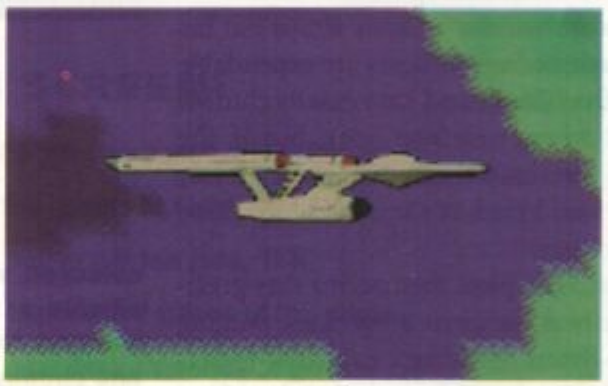
(Above) If it's a purer arcade experience the player seeks, the sensor screen can be blown up to fill the entire screen. It looks nicer, but none of the bridge facilities, like damage control and radar, are available, making things a whole lot tougher.

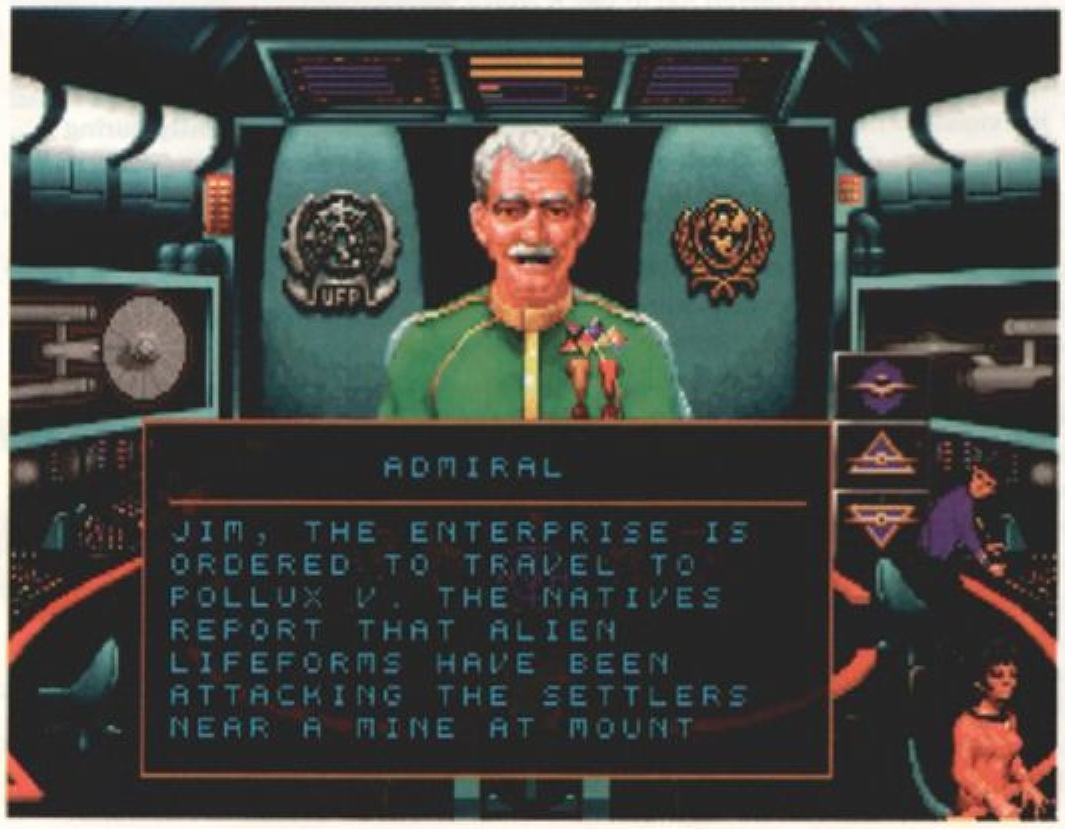
(Top Right) The Galactic Map acts as the game's copy protection - the manual is required to find out which planet is which, and if the player fumbles and comes out of warp speed in the wrong system, he faces death at the hands of an irate enemy.

(Bottom Right) The player is treated to a pretty set-piece animation whenever the Enterprise is put into orbit.

(Below) Orders from Star Fleet always come from one of the Admirals, who provides the vaguest description of the mission before disappearing and leaving Kirk to work the rest out for himself. He also pops up at the end of a successful mission to award commendation points based on how well you did - these points are translated into crew experience which helps to make the Enterprise's systems more effective in combat.





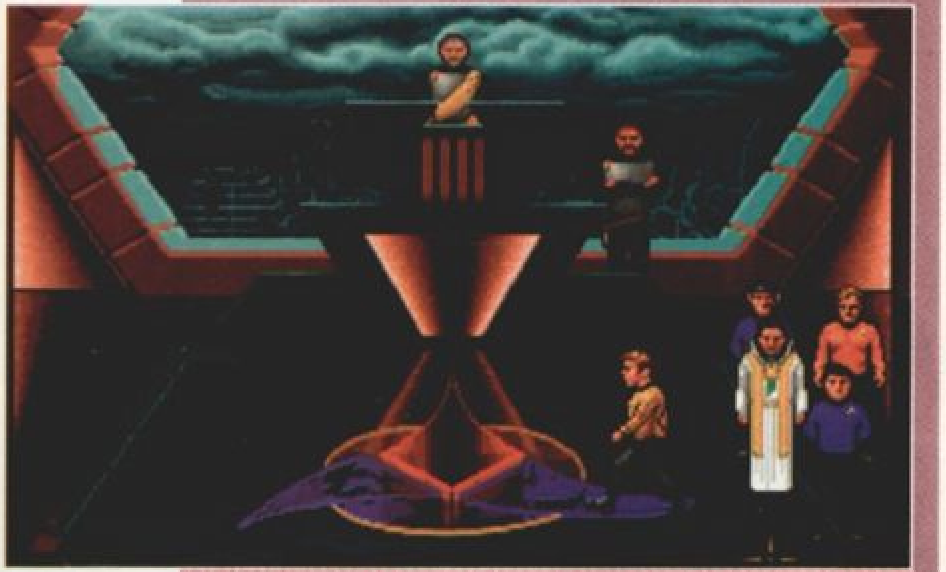


ADMIRAL

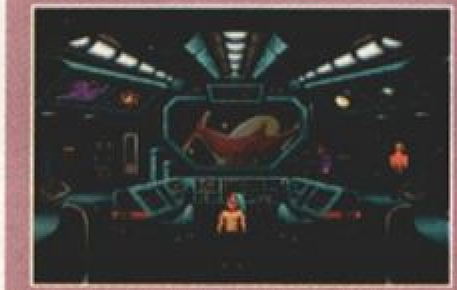
JIM, THE ENTERPRISE IS ORDERED TO TRAVEL TO POLLUX V. THE NATIVES REPORT THAT ALIEN LIFEFORMS HAVE BEEN ATTACKING THE SETTLERS NEAR A MINE AT MOUNT

TO BOLDLY GO...

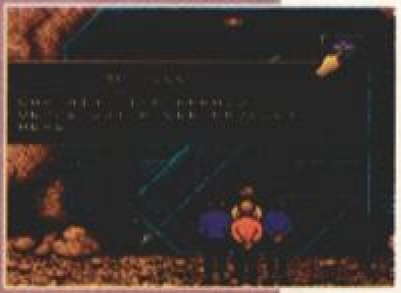
Once the landing party has beamed down from the ship, the real fun begins. There's no end to the scrapes that Kirk and his team can get into - here's a choice selection...



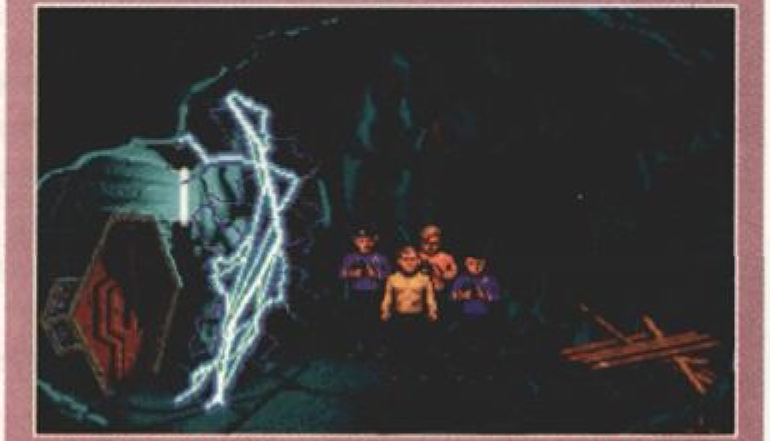
In The Feathered Serpent, Kirk must stand trial by a Klingon court for attempting to protect a harmless fugitive by the name of Quetzecoatl. With such a vicious system of justice, can Kirk survive?



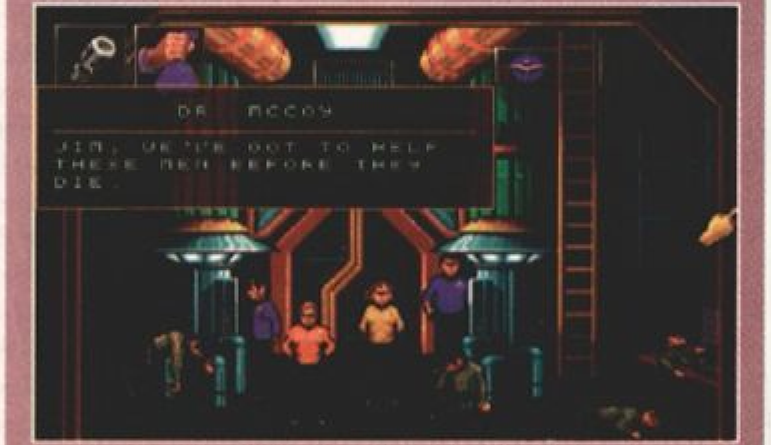
In Love's Labor Jeopardized, a deadly virus has broken out inside an orbiting space laboratory. Worse still, the Romulans have decided to lay seige to the station at the same time! Guess shose job it is to sort out the mess by finding an antidote...?



Just one of the problems faced by Kirk in That Old Devil Moon. An ancient alien civilisation has been discovered on this desert planet - but how on Earth do you get through this giant door?



The thrills of The Feathered Serpent escalate when Kirk and his team are challenged to complete this Klingon battle of wits. The door isn't locked, but how do you get past the deadly forcefield?

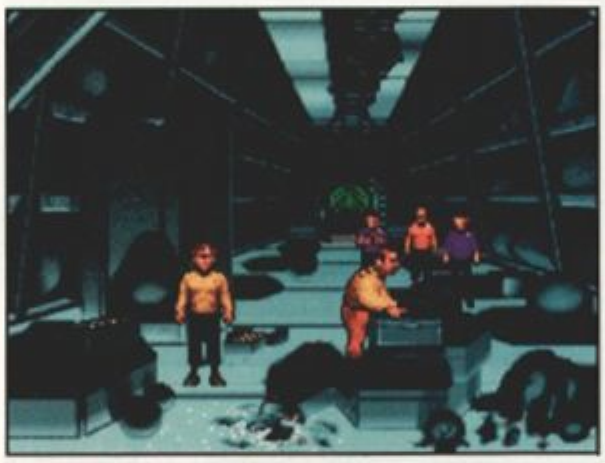


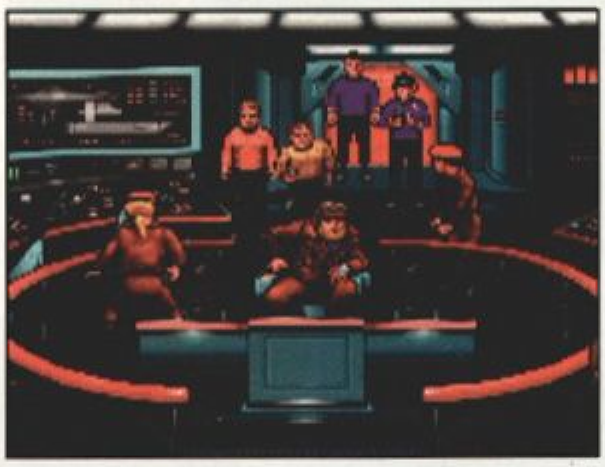
DR. MCCOY

JIM, WE'VE GOT TO HELP THESE MEN BEFORE THEY DIE.

In many situations, Doctor McCoy's medical kit is not enough, especially when trying to treat aliens like these dying Romulans. In these cases, Bones must manufacture special medicines - but how?

STAR TREK





(Above) Kirk comes face-to-face with a band of ruthless Elasi terrorists on the bridge of a stolen Federation ship in Kidnapped. Will it be a phaser fight, or can Jim bring things to an amicable conclusion? It's up to you...

61▶

tems. Scotty carries out the repair work as quickly as he can, but in the later combats even his experienced hands may not be able to keep up with the continued pounding.

With the combat over (if indeed there's any to start with), and the relevant cursory stuff completed (Kirk should always have a chat with Spock and get Uhura to attempt radio contact), the next step is to beam down to the rendezvous point - be it a planet, ship, space station or whatever - which triggers the start of the game's predominant adventure element. A trip to the transporter room is a necessity on every mission, with the landing party or "away team" always comprised of Kirk, Spock, Doctor McCoy and the ubiquitous red-uniformed security officer.

> ***Interplay's game isn't just based on Star Trek. It IS Star Trek, and I'm having a very hard time getting over just how authentic, atmospheric and enchanting it really is.***

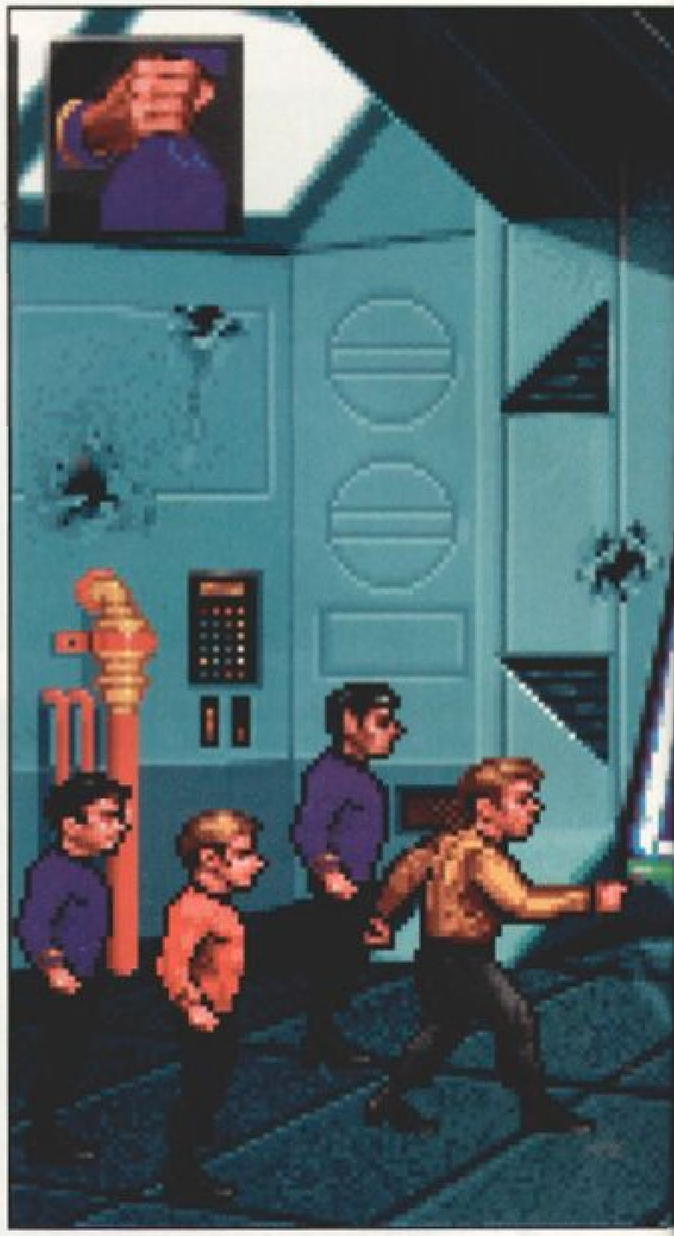
Having beamed down from the Enterprise, Kirk and his team are free to explore the landscape in standard point-and-click fashion. The size of each episode's environment varies, but generally it's a very self-contained affair, with a high volume of puzzles, posers and interactive characters that make up a whole story within as few as half a dozen locations. The player only controls Kirk directly (the rest of the team follow him automatically from location to location), with all the standard adventure options - Talk, Get, Look and Use - available from a simple graphic menu. The majority of the puzzles are based on collecting objects and putting them to good use elsewhere, although it's the party's permanent inventory of standard equipment that continually proves the most useful. Spock's tricorder, for instance, works like a very powerful version of Look, scanning an area or object and revealing information that the eye would never see. In turn, McCoy has a medical kit and a tricorder of his own for analysing the wounded or dead (he actually says "He's dead, Jim" when he scans a corpse - it's great), while Kirk has his communicator for contacting the orbiting Enterprise and everyone has a phaser which can, of course, be set to kill or stun.

Given the Federation's prime directive of non-interference and no unnecessary violence, the phasers are hardly ever used (psychopaths go home - the game won't let you shoot at anything you don't have to). and TALKing is the favoured alternative whenever a new character is encountered. As superior officer, Kirk always does the talking, and conversations work in the same way as Monkey Island with the player choosing from a list of responses at pertinent intervals in the dialogue.

Despite the fact that Kirk does a lot of the legwork himself, it's by no means his show, and none of the missions could be completed without the expertise of Bones and Spock close at hand. Whenever it comes to operating a complex piece of machinery, programming a computer or doing anything vaguely technical, Spock's the only man who can handle it. McCoy, on the other hand, has medical talents that range from curing the sick and injured to manufacturing special medicines and identifying dangerous bacteria in the air. As for the security officer - well, every Trekkie knows that his only job is to be the first one to get shot whenever a baddy whips out his phaser. As such, security officers are expendable (though Starfleet Command isn't exactly chuffed when you lose one), but if the invaluable Kirk, Spock or McCoy are killed, it's immediately game over.

The plots themselves vary greatly as the game progresses, ranging from rescuing a captured Federation vessel from the hands of Elasi terrorists to freeing an orbiting medical centre that's under attack from the Romulans, being tried by the vicious Klingon legal system, deactivating a deadly computer system that's woken up after centuries of dormancy and even foiling the plans of that favourite Star Trek baddy, Harry Mudd. It's this episodic formula that does wonders for Star Trek's playability and atmosphere. With an intro and epilogue for each one, they really do feel like TV episodes, and unlike conventional adventures, there's very little chance of getting bored prior to completion as the player's interest is revitalised at the start of each new "show". The combined teams of ACE and sister mag CU Amiga, who were cramming into the games room every time a mission was completed to see what the next one held are living testament to that fact.

The adventures themselves are small but perfectly formed. Though none of the missions are



PC Version

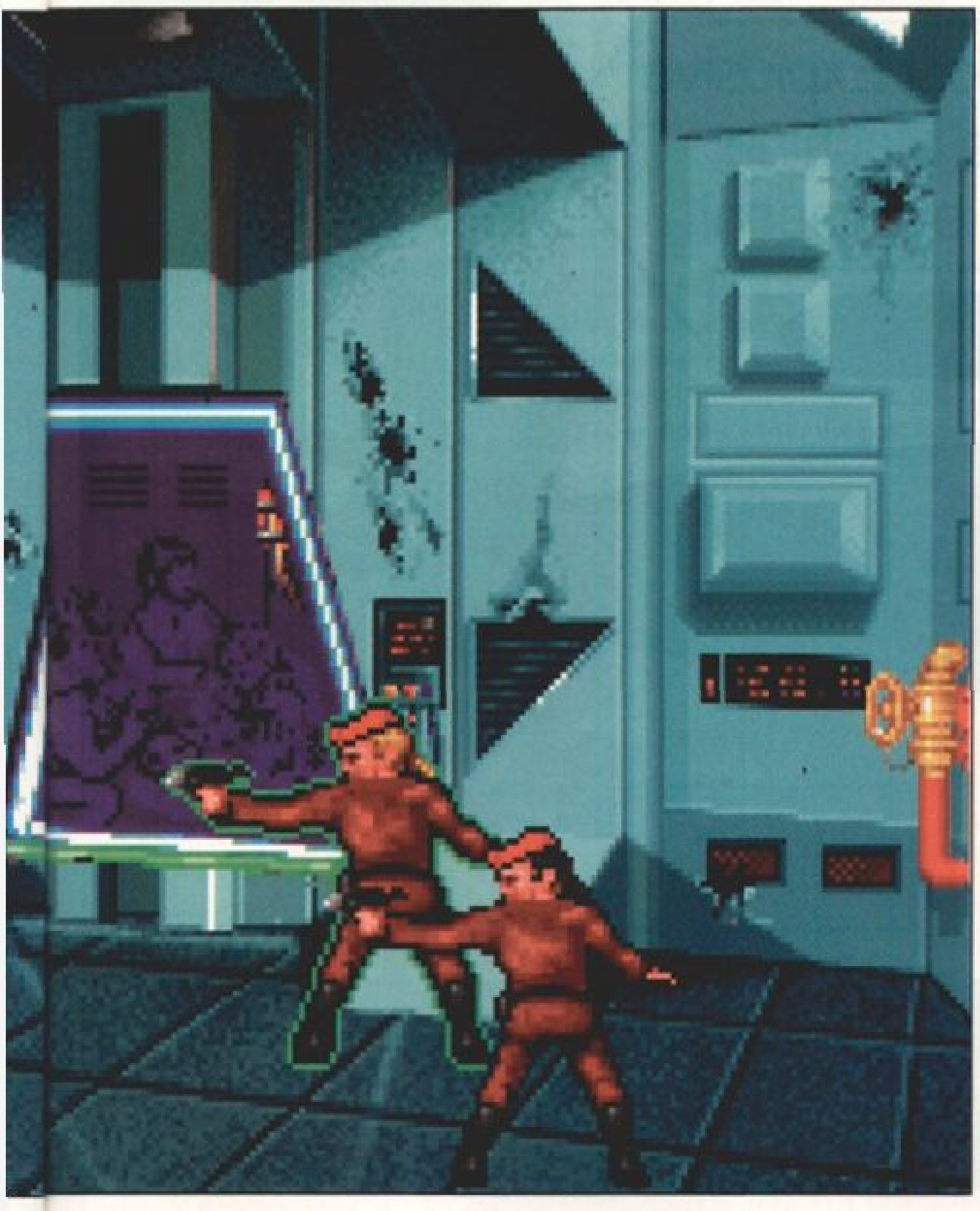
Superb soundcard music and effects make Star Trek a sonic treat, and the visuals are superb throughout - brightly-coloured, well-defined and instantly recognisable as from the TV show. A word of warning, though - you really do need a big and chunky PC to get the most out of the game. The game will run without VGA or a sound card, but they're both mandatory if you want to really get into the swing of things. It takes an age to install, and the hard disk is accessed constantly during play, making a fast machine a necessity.

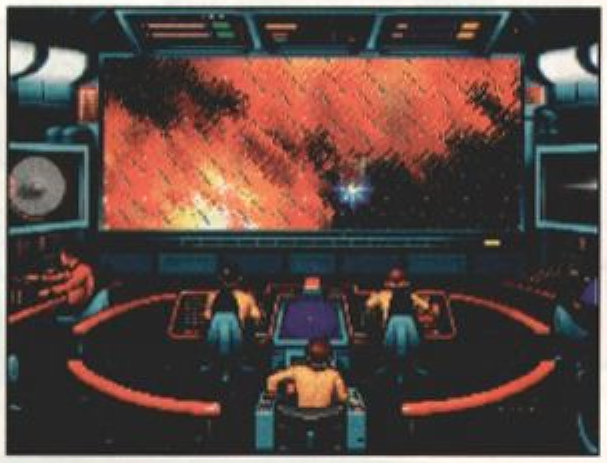
Amiga Version

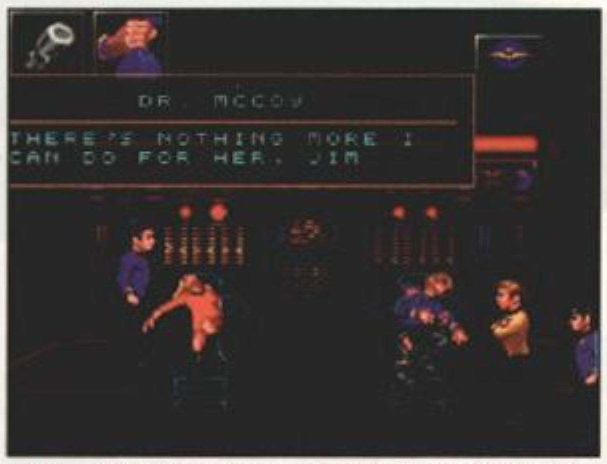
The fate of Star Trek on the Amiga is still undecided at time of writing. The game's just so technicially demanding that it may be too much for the machine to handle feasibly. There's talk that it may appear in some sort of CD-driven incarnation... more news as and when.

ST Version

Sorry ST-fans, but you definitely will not be going where no man has gone before. Electronic Arts have no plans for an Atari version.







DR. MCCOY

THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN DO FOR HER, JIM

A fine example of Star Trek's superb graphical authenticity. This sick bay is accurate right down to the little coloured sliders (which are supposed to indicate life-signs) that move up and down in no particular sequence.

really that long, each one has bags of head-scratching potential, and the idea of having a party of four on-screen characters working together to solve the puzzles rather than a solitary figure works wonders both for the game and for the televisual atmosphere. In fact it's Star Trek's remarkable authenticity that is by far its most impressive aspect. Interplay's designers have no doubt broken their backs researching every minute detail of Star Trek's look, sound, dialogue, characters and little touches, and the result is nigh-on perfection. I challenge even the most devout Trekkie to find the slightest inaccuracy or omission. Everything is spot-on, from the title track and incidental music to the teleportation effects, McCoy/Spock arguments and even the way Kirk sits in his bridge chair. I can safely say that I've never seen a licenced game that does such justice to its subject matter. Interplay's game isn't just based on Star Trek. It IS Star Trek, and I'm having a very hard time getting over just how authentic, atmospheric and enchanting it really is.

Normally, adventures leave me cold. I don't have anything like the patience and logical insight required to play them, but Star Trek's user-friendliness and terrific atmosphere had me - and the rest of the office - under its spell from the moment the first few bars of the opening music made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. The combat aspect may not be to everyone's taste, but it doesn't intrude too much, and what's left can safely be described as a joy to behold. Anybody who ever enjoyed the TV show should buy this immediately, as should any adventurer with a modicom of self respect. Me? I'm still reeling with the shock.

● **Gary Whitta**

PUT IT ON SCREEN!

Yes indeed! Scotty may not be able to "give ye annae more, Cap'n", but we certainly can. Thanks to out top chums at Electronic Arts, we've got ten (yes, TEN!) superlative videos of the original Star Trek TV series to give away. If you're not already a Trekkie, here's your chance to become one with a stonking set of vids to get your collection off to a whanging good start. There's over 20 top-class episodes to get your teeth into here, and to be their proud owner, all you have to do is answer three simple questions:

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2. In what century is Star Trek set?

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RATINGS

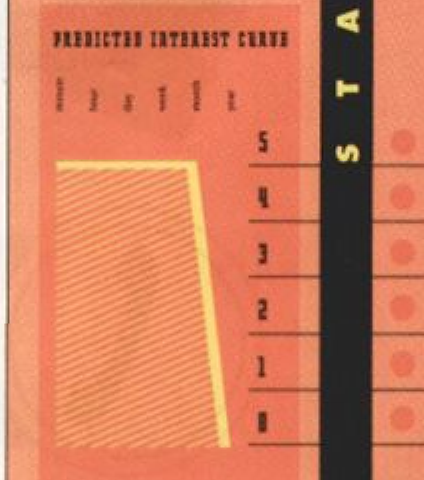
Awesome televisual authenticity.	Maybe too easy for adventure hardnuts.
Superb Presentation.	Arcade side is a bit of a let-down.
Looks lovely, sounds lovely too.	

940 PC RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	8	9	9

With the episodic presentation, Star Trek does a fine job of holding the players interests by doing it in short bursts rather than trying to string things out over one long story. Because the puzzles are often very difficult, and occasionally a bit illogical (ironic, eh?), it can be easy to get stuck, and it's here that the episode idea sometimes backfires. Each mission is set within just a few screens, and you can't go onto the next without completing the current one. So if you get seriously stuck, you've got no chance of exploring elsewhere and seeing any more of the game. It can be a touch irritating. The space combat stuff may also pose a problem for serious adventurers who aren't hot on the arcade side, but more well-rounded gamers should have no trouble. The only real problem is the overall longevity, as defined by the number of missions - with only *eight of them, seasoned adventurers* may find the challenge distressingly short-lived. Those new to the genre, however, would be hard-pushed to find a friendlier, more enjoyable and absorbing experience.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



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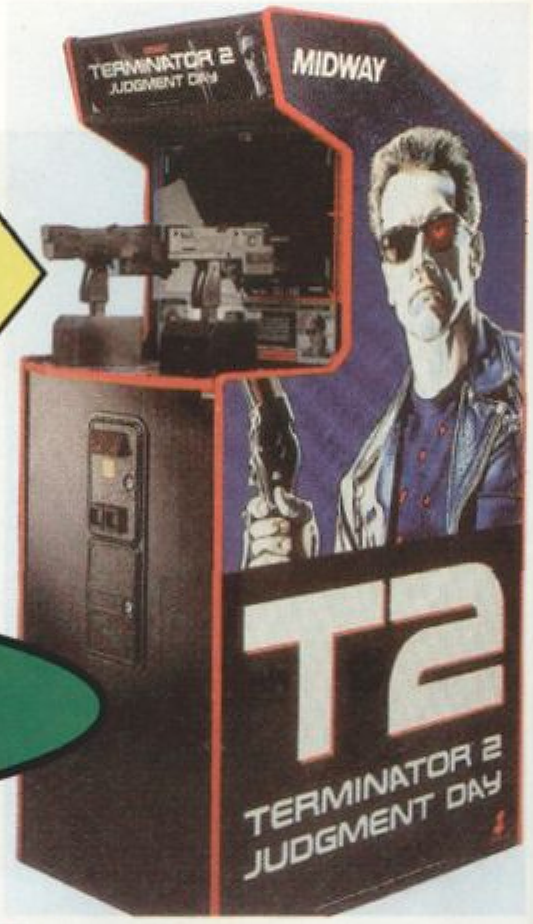
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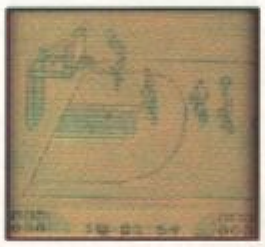
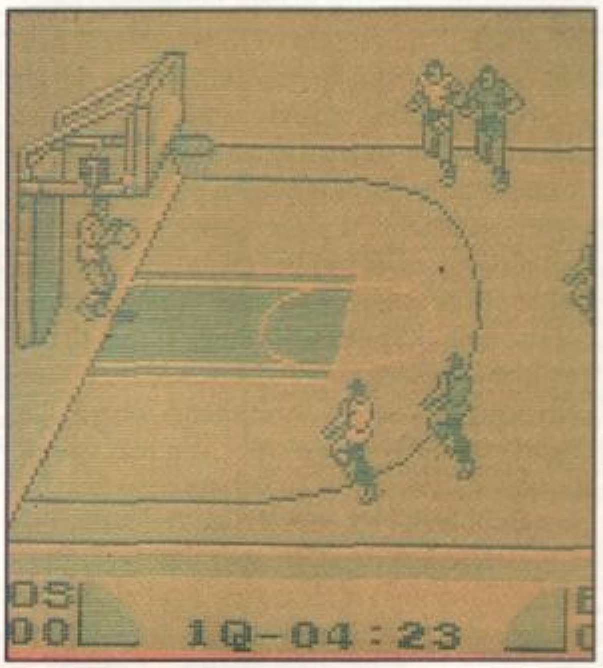
DOUBLE DRIBBLE 5 ON 5





PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

Top graphics

Smart sound

Useless opponent intelligence

Slightly annoying control method

Phew. Basketball, eh? All those big sweaty men jumping up in the air. I can't get enough of it, I can tell you. So I was especially pleased at the opportunity of reviewing one of the better presented basketball titles released over the past few months.

The game can be played either solo or with a mate (providing they also have a Gameboy and a copy of the game) and there's also an option to define the length of each quarter depending on whether play is going to take the form of a lengthy session or a twenty minute blast.

Next up comes the tricky decision of which team the player is going to go up against. The various strengths and weaknesses of each team from across the states is indicated with a peculiar sort of pentagram thing (like the ratings system in Megatech).

And before you know it, it's into the match, with the bully-off or whatever it's called happening and the computerised players inevitably taking possession and legging it up the rink to try and score a goal.

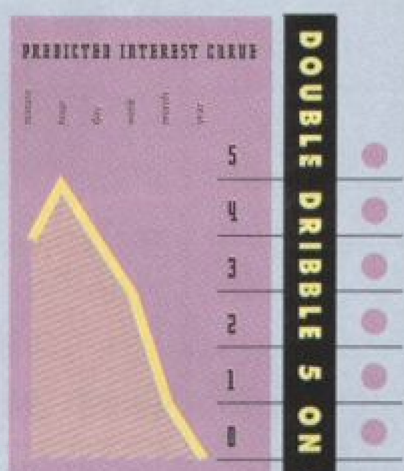
In fact, the computer players ALWAYS seem to be taking possession of the ball, even though there's a "steal" option, I couldn't make the bloody thing work.

Another worrying feature is the distinct lack off intelligence in the computer players. After only a couple of attempts, I - blessed with the most rudimentary basketball skills - managed to produce a sure-fire system of scoring a basket every time. When faced with more skillful opposition, this is trickier to reproduce, but the computerised players shouldn't be able to be so completely ignorant

● Jim Douglas

DOUBLE DRIBBLE 5 ON 5 RATINGS

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



Nice presentation, shame about the content. Some crappy artificial intelligence coupled with some rubbish player controls (you have to click the B button to gain control of the player nearest the ball) make it a hard game to love. Hardened experts are unlikely to find much long-term fun here, but for the tube-travelling brigade keen to make those long Victoria line stops slightly more bearably, it's okay.

G	IQ	A	IT
9	2	9	8

720 GAMEBOY RATING

PRINCE OF PERSIA

PRICE
£29.99

Original's superb feel has been captured perfectly.

Excellent music score.

Handy password system.

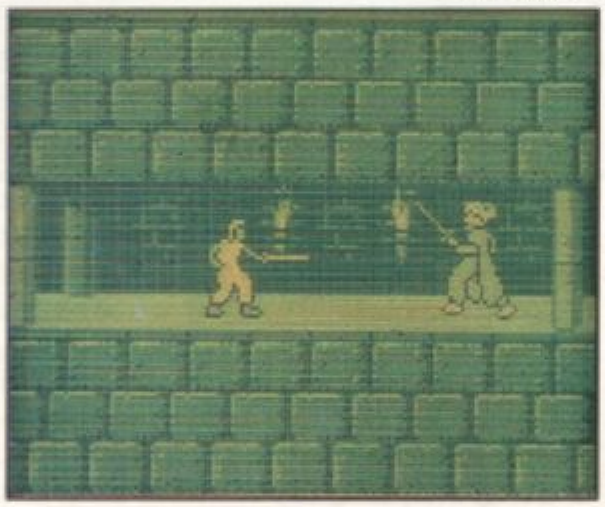
Swordfighting doesn't work very well.

I never thought that the members of the ACE staff would come to blows, but things came dangerously close to reaching a violent flashpoint this month when this cartridge slipped innocently into the office. With the original 16-bit versions of Prince of Persia being one of ACE's personal all-time favourite games, the arrival of this GameBoy version inevitably led to a nasty scuffle over who got first go.

Anybody who may have been worried about a handheld version of Broderbund's platform classic being cut-down or compromised in any way in this handheld interpretation can at last breathe easily, as GameBoy Prince of Persia is almost identical to the computer versions. All the levels are there, all the music, the special potions, the swordfighting, the traps... bar a few graphical differences (the skeletons now appear as eerie tanslucent images of the evil Jaffar, for instance) it's got the lot. The convertors have done a fine job of translating the complex control method, with the player able to perform all the nail-biting acrobatics with the minimum of fuss. The only small gripe is with the swordfighting, which isn't as fluid as instinctive as in the original.

What's most surprising is that, on the whole, the game is every bit as playable and nerve-racking on this tiny screen with these slightly more crudely-defined graphics as it ever was. Experienced players will soon feel that old "Prince magic" flooding back, which just goes to show how well the game's superb playability and feel have been captured. I'll make no bones about it - I still think Prince is the best arcade adventure on any computer, and now it's the best on the GameBoy too. So go get it.

● Gary Whitta



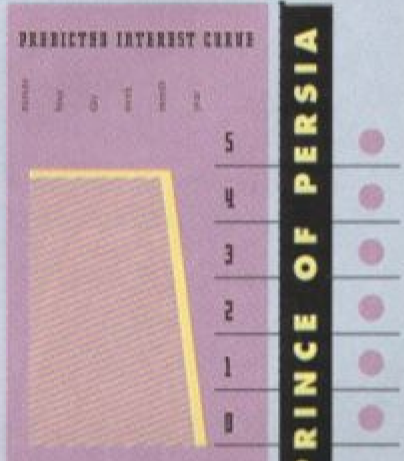
900 GAMEBOY RATING

G	IQ	A	IT
8	4	8	9

With all of the original's 12 levels (the latter of which are RIGHT devious) and a handy password system, Prince's lastability factor is top notch. Because the game works on a time system instead of lives, it never gets too frustrating, instead spurring the player on to have another go. Some players may get a bit annoyed by some of the later levels which are really very hard, but toughened gamers will no doubt lap up the challenge on offer here. Superb.

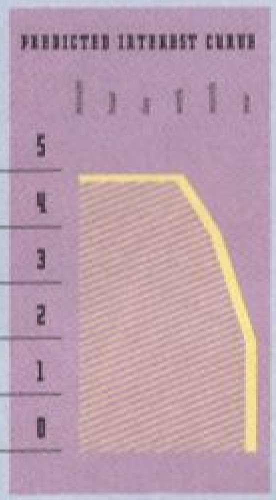
PRINCE OF PERSIA RATINGS

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



SNOW BROTHERS

SNOW BROTHERS RATINGS



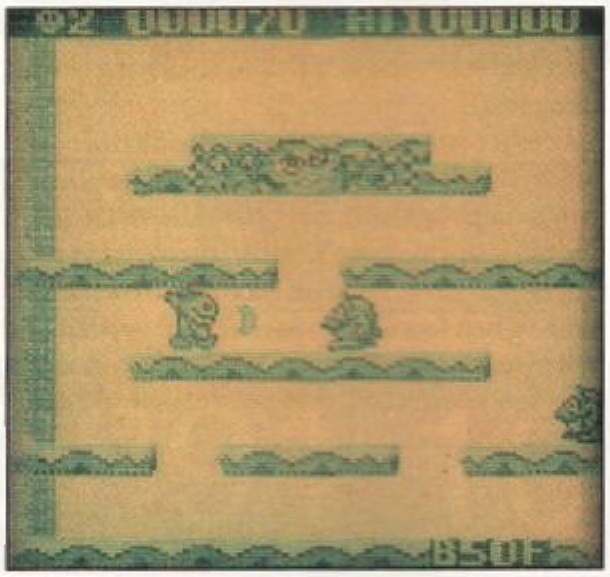
The super little theme tune and surprisingly nice graphics draw the player in, and there's a lot of compulsion to keep on playing once the jist has been picked up after the first few levels. 50 levels may sound like a lot, but none of them are really that tough if the player puts his mind to it - thankfully, the regular arrival of the big guardians keeps throwing a spanner in the works and makes things tougher. This is a smart little game, and one you'll be playing long after it's completed.

7	1	8	8
G	IQ	A	FF

GAMEBOY RATING **800**

Look out Mario Brothers, here come the... Aaargh! Phew, that was a close one. I nearly said the most unbelievably trite thing ever. Not only that, but it's also inaccurate, as if anyone in the platform world is under threat from these two cuddly characters, it's not Mario and Luigi but those old favourites, Bub and Bob. As nice and playable as Capcom's latest (converted from its own semi-popular coin-op) is, there can be no denying that it's a rather cynical reworking of Bubble Bobble.

This Gameboy version is actually called Snow Brothers Jnr (although you only find this out once you've switched the game on), the reason being, like the handheld version of Bubble Bobble, there's no simultaneous two player mode. Instead the storyline has been tweaked, explaining that your snow bro has been kidnapped and it's up to you to get him back - on your tod. The resultant platform icecapades aren't quite as much fun as they would be with a pal, but a veritable hoot nonetheless. Like Bobble, the player's objective is to rid each non-scrolling screen of baddies using his special power - in this case, magic snowballs. Hitting a baddy repeatedly encases him in a ball of slush, which can then be rolled down the screen until it hits the bottom, destroying the nasty. Smart players can throw the ball so it picks up more baddies on its way, with special bonuses available for such shrewd tactics.



Extra powers available via the hot sauce (!) bottles include speed shoes and power shots, and at the end of every few levels there's a big baddy to contend with. As derivative as it may sound, it's actually a lot of fun - much more so than the poor Bubble Bobble conversion. Definitely one of the more playable Gameboy titles to surface in recent months - it's just a crying shame about the lack of a two-player option, really.

● **Gary Whitta**

PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

Super-jolly music.
Loadsalevels.

No two-player - boo!

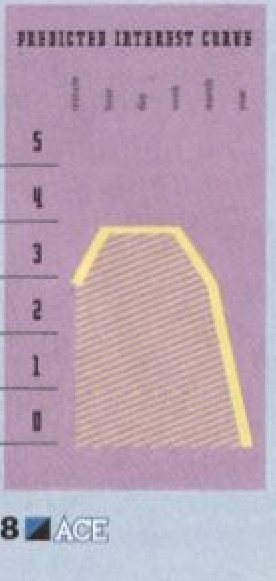
THE ADDAMS FAMILY

GAMEBOY RATING **775**

G	IQ	A	FF
7	2	7	7

As soon as the START button is pressed, The Addams Family gives the player a very hard time, assaulting him with all manner of baddies. It's not terribly tough, but it's hard enough to put novice or less patient players off early on. There is some compulsion to see what lies beyond the first few stages, but it's a good bet that most people who play it will never see the end, either through it being too difficult - or just not interesting enough.

THE ADDAMS FAMILY RATINGS



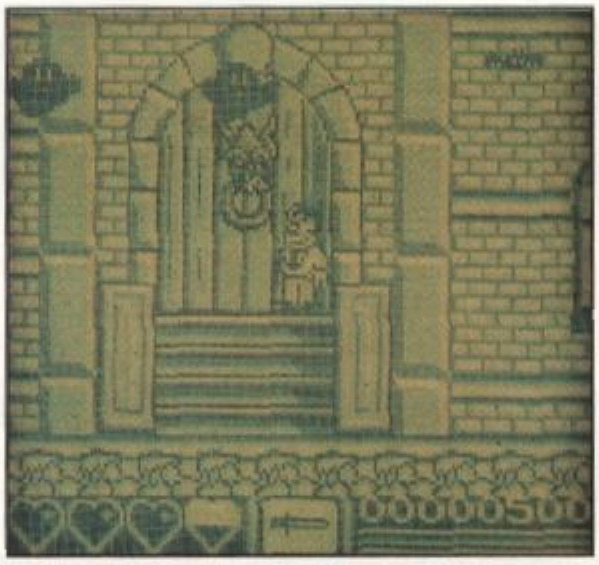
They're creepy and they're kooky, they're scary and they're spooky, they're altogether ooky... so "ooky" in fact that they're now on the GameBoy in, it has to be said, rather predictable fashion. Based on the surprisingly-successful movie adaptation, Ocean's game (which is bound for computer formats soon - see Previews), it's a predictable and not particularly inspired platform romp with the player taking the role of kooky head-of-the-household Gomez.

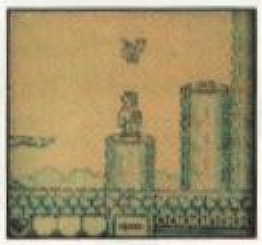
The story goes that the rest of the family have been kidnapped by their scheming attorney, and it's up to Gomez to save them, one at a time, and then take on the evil lawyer himself. Doing so entails running and leaping, in suspiciously similar style to Mario's GameBoy exploits, through the Addams' multi-storey gothic mansion and the surrounding grounds, doing battle with an array of suitably ghoulish baddies along the way.

It's all pretty standard platform fare, with Gomez chucking little swords (he likes to fence) at his adversaries, uncovering bonuses and generally behaving in a Mario-like way. It sort of works, although there are some irksome elements - Gomez's jumping action is strangely restrained and doesn't feel conducive to play, and it actually seems as though there are too many platforms, as almost everything can be walked on. It gets annoying.

The Addams Family isn't a bad little platform game. It's certainly nothing special, but it'll provide an adequate fix for levels'n'ladders junkies for a while. Addams Family fans are unlikely to be impressed, as the game is very generic and bears little relation to the movie. Take a look - but approach with caution.

● **Gary Whitta**





PRICE
£29.99
(Import)

Fairly playable platform fun.
Nice graphics and jolly music.

Annoying difficult.
Never really gets exciting.

Special thanks to Shekhana Consoles (081 889 9412) for the loan of these review cartridges.

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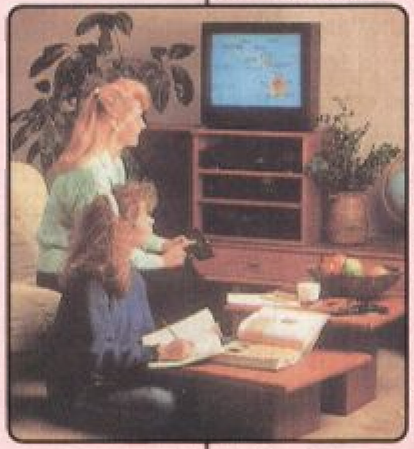

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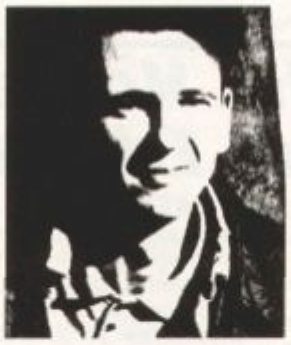
ATARI'S CLASSIC

TEMPEST

by Steve Kelly and Dan Malone



Given the chance, how would today's premiere games designers re-write their own favourite classics? This month, two of the Bitmap Brothers' top talents take up the challenge...

"Because it's my personal favourite game of all time," says Bitmap Brother Steve Kelly when asked why he chose to give the 90s treatment to Atari's decade-old coin-op classic. "There are some games that are absolutely perfect. Take Missile Command for instance - I don't think there's anything you could do to make that game any better. But I think that something like Tempest is just right for an update."

Steve's conviction in this matter is not to be questioned. He first encountered the original coin-op just after he left Psion as a Spectrum programmer back in 1984 ("it just happened to be in a pub I frequented at the time"), and was instantly hooked. Such was his enthusiasm for the game that he went on to write a special 2-dimensional version of the game for the ZX81 - eventually published by the now-defunct Mikrogen. Naturally, he jumped at the chance to - hypothetically at least - turn his favourite game into the modern-day coin-op of his dreams.

"The reason why I think Tempest 92 would work so well is that, while it's very difficult to find fault with the original gameplay, there's a great deal that can be done with the graphics and control technology we have today," Steve explains. Not wanting to restrict himself, he and co-designer Dan Malone (who also produced the conceptual drawings here) have approached the project as if they were producing a new coin-op as opposed to just a 16-bit version.

For those who never saw Tempest when it first appeared (and there will be a lot of you, as despite its excellence it was never really that popular), it's about as simple as games get - but at the time it broke new ground both in gameplay and technical terms, using 3D technology and vector graphics in a way never before seen. Played over a series of vaguely cone-shaped "webs" with lines running down towards a central vanishing point, Tempest saw the player piloting a tiny craft at high speed around the rim of the cone, blasting away at an array of horrid spider-like nasties which scuttled up the strands towards him. Despite a few variations in the shape of the web and alien types, that was about all there was to it - one of Steve's major gripes with the game.

For Tempest 92, Steve and Dan have come up with a far more sophisticated approached constructed on the same gameplay principles. "The playfield in Tempest 92 is similar to the original," explains Steve, "but the increase in technology enables the vectors to be filled, with shading to give a much better feel of depth and to make the whole game more pleasing to the eye." Probably

NME!

For Tempest 92, Steve has designed a whole new set of enemies which he says would be much more intelligent than those in the original. "As well as advancing from the centre of the web, they'd also come at the player from behind and attach to the outside edge of the playfield." Here's just a few of the bad guys he's concocted...

■ STUPIDS
These simply attack down one segment and try to hit the player.

■ SWITCHERS
Same as Stupids, except they change segments as they move forward.

■ SPIRALS
Intelligent enemies which spiral up the cone, switching lanes so as to position themselves as close to the player as possible.

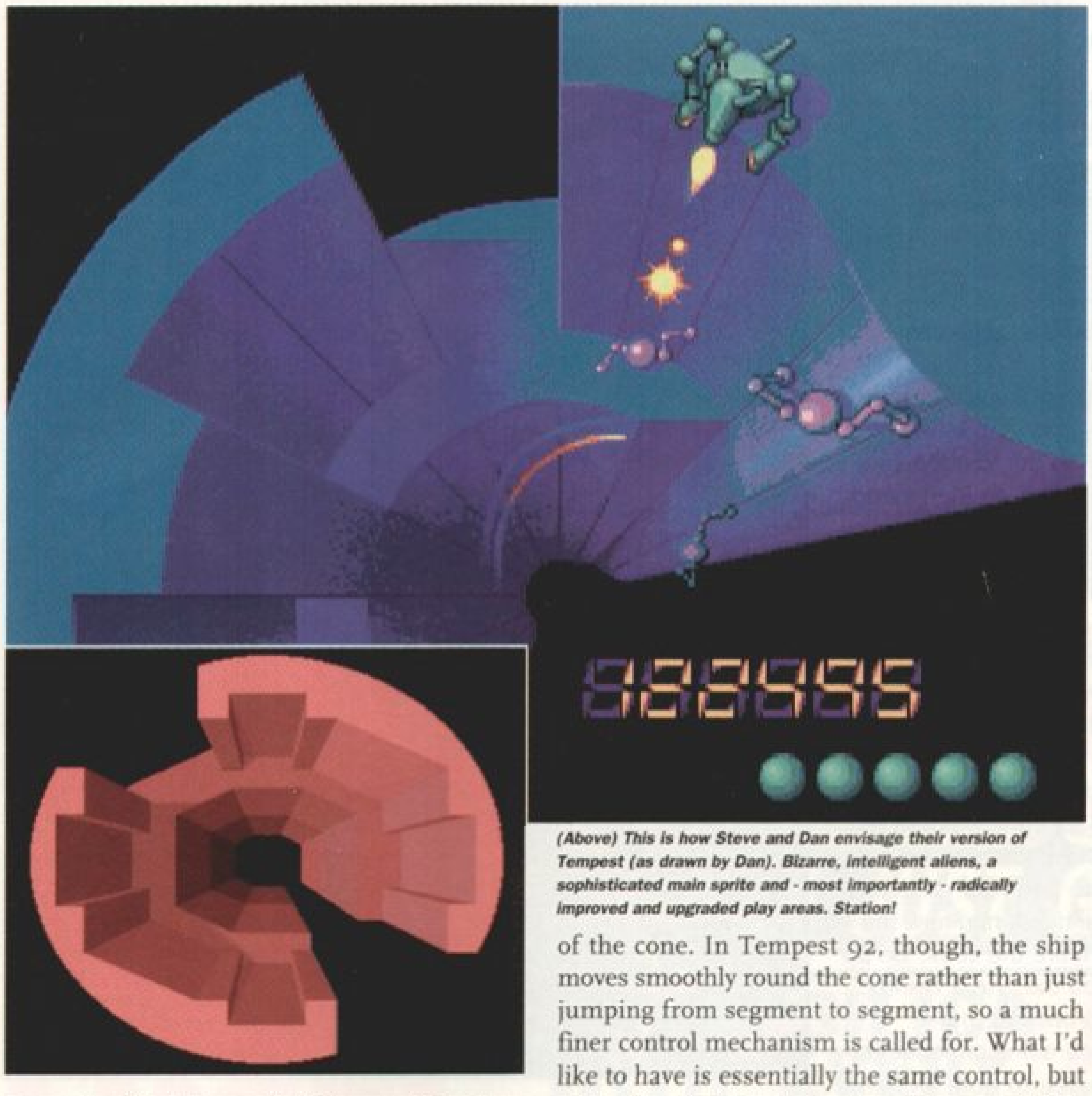
■ SPIKERS
These leave behind spikes which are deadly to the player as they advance.

■ SUPER SPIRALS
The same as spirals, but totally manic! These change lanes VERY quickly.

■ ATTACKERS
Highly intelligent enemies that climb up onto raised segments and shoot back at the player.

■ SPLITTERS
When shot, these break into three or five identical aliens. Nasty!

■ BLOCKERS
These advance for a short distance, then drop a new raised segments. Other aliens can then use this as a defensive position!



(Above) This is how Steve and Dan envisage their version of Tempest (as drawn by Dan). Bizarre, intelligent aliens, a sophisticated main sprite and - most importantly - radically improved and upgraded play areas. Station!

the most radical change that Steve and Dan have decided to make are the raised and indented segments in the cone section. These 3-dimensional ledges and platforms are clearly visible on the screens shown here and add a major new element to the gameplay - the intelligent aliens (a Bitmap trademark) use the playfield to their advantage, hiding behind ledges and climbing over outcrops to keep out of the player's line of fire. "This means the player would have to advance down into the cone and take on those enemies 'one-to-one' - while at the same time enemies are infesting other areas of the playfield!" Steve explains. "As well as making the combat more interesting, these raised segments are used as bridges to join separate parts of a play-cone," he continues.

"The whole idea idea of these raised segments is to give the game a much more strategic feel by dividing the play-cones into separate areas, each of which need to be defended and be specifically attacked by the enemy in a blitz. This feel was the only major thing lacking in the original game - you often just randomly spin around the disk with your finger on the fire button in the hope of killing as much as possible. And the really clever bit is that there is no real limit on the number of play-cones, as they would be generated from very small data structures."

Designing Tempest 92 as a coin-op rather than a home computer game has also allowed Steve and Dan to come up with an innovative new control system. "The original coin-op was controlled by a rotating dial which moves the ship around the edge of the play-cone," says Steve. "A turn of 12.5 degrees moves the ship to the next segment of the cone. In Tempest 92, though, the ship moves smoothly round the cone rather than just jumping from segment to segment, so a much finer control mechanism is called for. What I'd like to have is essentially the same control, but with a 'jog-disc' situated on top of the central dial. This disc would have a small indentation where the player places his index finger. The best way to imagine it is by comparing it to a VCR with a jog-shuttle control.

"There are two buttons used for shooting and 'super zapper'. The button is mounted on a hand-gripped joystick lever that is nudged forward and backwards to zoom the ship in and out of the playfield. The super-zapper, mounted on top of the joystick is activated by the thumb and can be used three times per cone to destroy all on-screen aliens. Also, you've got a large trackball, like in Marble Madness and Missile Command, that can be used in conjunction with three buttons to change the viewpoint. Pressing the each button while rotating the ball would rotate the entire playfield through x, y and z axes. As nice as it would look, it's only really window-dressing and there's a restore button to quickly reset the play view."

Steve and Dan admit they surprised themselves with their Tempest 92 design. "Considering we only had a week to do it and I've never done anything like this before, I'm really pleased with the way it turned out," Steve admits. So much so, in fact, that there's just the slightest possiblity that the Bros might actually advance things a stage and produce the game for real! It's only a pipe dream at the moment, but you never know. At the very least, the project has got Steve's nostalgia glands working over time. "There's a shop down in Croydon that sells all old coin-ops, and I'm thinking of popping down there to see if I can get hold of an old Tempest machine. It's really got me going..."

PICKUPS!

An updated arcade game just wouldn't be complete without extra weapons, and Steve has made sure that Tempest 92 has them in spades. "These would be dropped by certain enemies when shot and awarded at times when the game calls them," he explains.

SPEEDUP

Increases velocity of player's shots.

SIDE SHOT

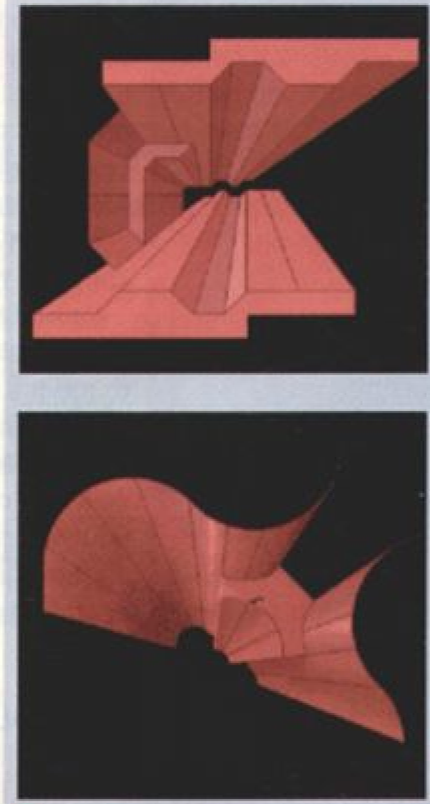
Allows the player to shoot at enemies that have reached the edge of the cone.

MULTI-SEGMENT SHOT

Bullets that fire not just down the player's segment, but down both adjacent segments.

SHIELD

These fire at 45 degrees and bounce off raised platforms - like the laser in R-Type.



(Left and below) Two more of Dan's experimental webs show just how versatile Tempest 92 play areas can be. By using simple algorithms, it's possible to create screens constructed of hard, straight blocks, like the top picture, or more gothic, flambouyant curves and swirls of the bottom design and the ellipsical cone on the far left. Note the use of ledges and raised segments in all the designs.

MANIC SHOT

These spin randomly around the play area in smooth arcs.

RETREAT

Forces all enemies to go back to the centre of the cone, giving the player a breather.

EXTRA LIVES AND ENERGY

Where would you be without them? "These are always placed in a dangerous area to tempt the player into taking a high risk," says Steve.

MONKEY ISLAND 2

LeCHUCK'S REVENGE

Ahoy, me hearties! Shiver me timbers! Brace me mainsail! (Etc, etc.) Yes, here it is - the first of a two-part complete solution to Lucasfilm's brilliant Benchmark-bearing adventure, all thanks to Elmo of Wave BBS in Australia. (By the way Elmo, send us your full address and we'll send you THREE pieces of software in repayment for your superb guide.) Take a deep breath - here we go...

Part 1
THE LARGO EMBARGO

First, enter Tickwood and get mugged by Largo. Now go to the swamp. Look at the coffin, use the coffin and row to the shack at the far right end of the scrolling swamp. Once inside look at the skulls and pick up the string. Find and talk to the Voodoo Lady. Now leave the hut.

Go back to Tickwood. Pick up the sign near the bridge (to get the spade) and go to the laundry ship. Take the bucket (near the three pirates). Walk to the bar ship but don't go in - click on one the three windows to the rear to enter the kitchen. Take the knife and exit via the window.

Go to the hotel ship and use the knife on the rope tethering the alligator, which will make a break for freedom and be chased by the innkeeper. Look at the bowl and take the cheese squigglies. Enter Largo's room and take the wig.

Now go to the cartographer's ship. Talk to him and take the blank paper. Go to the bar ship and talk to the bartender about Largo. Largo will now make his entrance and gob on the wall. When he's left, use the paper to wipe up the spit.

Walk to the swamp and use the bucket on the swamp to fill it with slime. Go back to Largo's room, close the door and use the bucket on the door. Hide behind the dressing screen. Watch Largo get covered in mud, follow him the laundry ship, have a chat to him then go back to his room. Close the door and take the claim ticket from the back of the door. Go to the laundry ship and give the ticket to Marty.

Walk to the cemetery and go to the graves. Find Marcus Largo's tombstone and use the shovel on his grave. After the theatrics, go back to the voodoo shack and give the spit-covered paper, the wig, the piece of Largo's laundry and the remains of Largo's ancestor to the Voodoo Lady. She'll make you a voodoo doll. Go to Largo's room and use the pins on the doll before Largo can throw you out.

After having LeChuck's living beard taken from you, have another chat to the Voodoo Lady and read the book on Big Whoop. Now go to the beach and pick up the stick (it's on the path leading back to town). Go to the laundry ship and and open the small box. Use the stick with the box to prop it open. Now use the string on the stick. Use the cheese squigglies on the box. When the rat starts eating pull the string, then open the box and take the startled rat.

Go back to the kitchen and use the rat on the pot. Now go to the bar tender and ask him how the stew is. He'll fire the cook. Go up on deck, read the "Help Wanted" sign then go back to the bartender and ask him about getting a job. Agree to work for him and take the 420 Gold Pieces. Leave the kitchen (via the window) and re-enter the bar to get fired (you'll be allowed to keep the money).

Walk to the cartographer's ship. When Wally removes his monocle to rub his eyes grab it. Now walk to the peninsula and talk to Captain Dread. Give him the monocle and charter his ship. Choose Booty Island on the map. When aboard the ship pick up the parrot seed and enter the cabin.

Part 2
THE FOUR MAP PIECES

On Booty Island talk to the old man and find out his name. Walk to the antique store and buy the pen, the ship's horn and the polished old saw. Walk up to Captain Kate and take a leaflet. Now walk to the spitting contest and walk up to the flags that mark Ist, 2nd and 3rd. Use the horn and when the Spitmaster walks off pick up the flags. (You dirty rotten low-down cheat.)

Return to the Jolly Rasta and sail to Phatt Island. You'll get arrested no matter what you say. Once in jail push the mattress and pick up the stick. Use the stick on the leg bone of the

LOOK AT
Give Pick up Use
Open Look at Push
Close Talk to Pull

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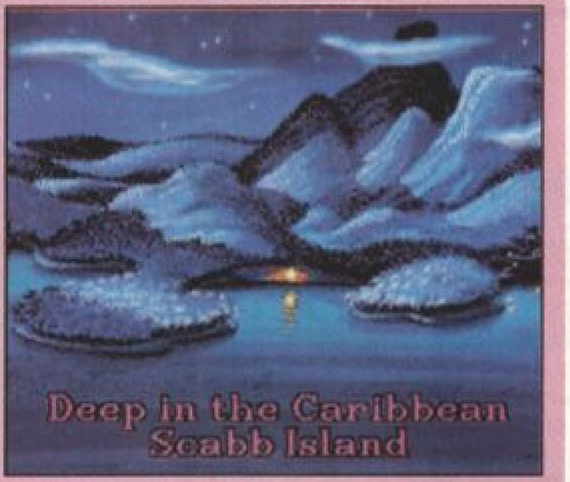
skeleton in the neighbouring cell. Give the bone to the dog. Take the keys and open the door. Look at the envelopes on the shelf. Take and open them both.

Walk to the library and look up 'Disasters' in the card file. When filling out your library card details make sure you give your age as 21 (the legal drinking age). Then take out any old book except 'The Joy Of Hex'. Walk to the miniature lighthouse near the door and open it. Take the lens.

Walk to the alley closest to the Jolly Rasta and watch the guy gambling. When he leaves, follow him to the other alley then knock on the door and ask for the next number. Count the number of fingers the doorman holds up when he says "If this is..." and give this is as your reply when he asks "How many is this...?" (There's no secret code at all! It's a con! Ooyah!)



Go and gamble and when you win ask for the invitation. Repeat this winning strategy until you have all three prizes. Walk to the Governor's mansion. Tell the guard that there's a fire in the kitchen then run upstairs. Use the book from the library on the book on the bed.

Return to Scabb Island (watch Kate get arrested). Go to the bar ship and order a Blue Whale and Yellowbeard's Baby. Use the blue drink on the yellow drink to make a green spit-thickener. Use the banana from the envelope on the metronome. Then pick up Jojo. Go to the laundry and saw the peg leg off the sleeping pirate. Now go to the woodsmith's ship and he won't be there. Take the hammer and the nails.

Go to Booty Island. Go to Stan's Previously-Owned Coffins and ask about buying one. Ask him to sit in it. Close the coffin lid and use the nails on it. Grab the crypt key and use the hammer on the cash register. Go to the spitting contest and have a go, but use the straw on the green drink first. Use different combinations of spitting terms until you win. Go to the antique dealer and ask about the map. He'll now tell you that he might trade it for something (the figurehead of the mad monkey). Sell him the spitting plaque and tell him it's the spit of the killer of LeChuck. He'll give you 6,000 Pieces Of Eight for it.

Now look at the book on disasters and find the co-ordinates of the mad monkey (write them down!). Go to Phatt Island, go to the jail and take the envelope on the shelf and free Kate. Go back to Booty Island and charter Kate's boat. Dive in once there and pick up the figurehead. Then pull the anchor. Go to the antique dealer and swap the figurehead for the map.

Go to the costume store and show the man your invite to the Mardi Gras. He'll give you a costume. Walk to Governor Marley's mansion. Show your costume and ticket to the guard then walk to the mansion. Push the trashcans and let the cook chase you around the house twice. When you have a good enough lead on him open the door near the trashcans and enter. Pick up the fish and leave.

Walk to the front of the mansion and pick up the dog. Go to Phatt Island and walk to the pier. Make a bet with the kid and win it by giving him the fish. He'll lie about his catch and make him know it. Now he'll give you his fishing pole. Go to the waterfall and walk to the top of it. Use Jojo on the pump. Now walk down and enter the tunnel. Once at the cottage open Kate's jail envelope (you'll now have some near-grog). Go inside and demand the map.

When you are given your mug, use it on the tree. Use the mug with the near-grog. When the man has passed out open the window to the left of the door. Go to Booty Island. Go to the mansion and enter. Walk upstairs. Take the oar above Elaine's bed and leave for the big tree. Pick up the plank and use it on the hole farthest left. Walk on top of it and use the oar in the next hole. Walk to the oar. Watch the dream (make sure Guybrush writes down the lyrics).

Then, once you have awoken, pick up the oar pieces and take them to the woodsmith on Scabb Island. Give the pieces to him and he'll fix it. Go to the cliff on Booty Island and use the fishing pole on the map piece. A bird will steal it and take it to the Big Tree. Now go to the Big Tree and walk to the plank. Use the oar on the next hole, then walk to the oar and pick up the plank. Use the plank on the next hole. Walk to the plank. Pick up the oar. Guybrush should do the rest automatically. Once at the top, go to the farthest little building and pick up the telescope. Go to the closest hut and walk to the door. Look at the maps and use the dog on the maps. Now you have another map piece.

Go to the antique store and use the parrot chow on the hook where the sign used to be. Now buy the mirror. Go to the cottage on Phatt Island and enter it. Use the mirror on the mirror frame. Exit and use the telescope on the

BATTLE ISLE

A veritable goody bag of level codes for this almost perfick Ubisoft wargame, courtesy of A. Yasin, Redbridge, London.

ONE PLAYER		*TWO PLAYER*	
1	COURA	1	GHOST
2	PHASE	2	MARSS
3	EXOTY	3	EAGLE
4	MOUNT	4	METAN
5	FIGHT	5	PHOTON
6	RUSTY	6	POLAR
7	FIFTH	7	TIGER
8	VESUV	8	SNAKE
9	MAGIC	9	ZENIT
10	SPACE	10	DONNN
11	VALEY	11	VESTA
12	TESTY	12	OXXID
13	TERRA	13	DEMON
14	SLAVE	14	GRANT
15	NEVER		
16	RIVER		

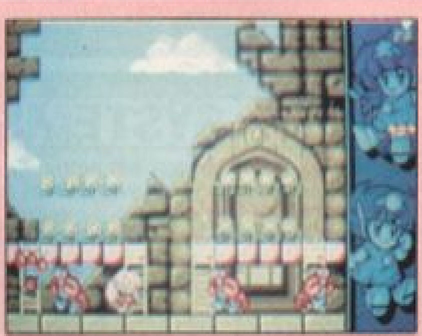
SNIP TIPS

HUDSON HAWK

Who wants to live for ever? You do! Amiganuts - type SCIENCEFICTION (no spaces) on the title screen for infinite lives while ST fans should try tapping in SANITYCLAUSEISCOMINGTOTOWN for the same effect.

Scott Walton, Lees, Lancashire

RODLAND



More infinite lives malarkey, this time for Storm's Amiga topper "It's so cute it'll make you puke" platform game. Press pause anytime during the game, press the HELP key five times and unpause the game. Simple enough for you? Even better, hit the space bar to skip through the levels.

A. Yasin, Redbridge, London

monkey statue in front of the cottage. Take note of which brick the light strikes then go inside, get the mirror and push the brick that the light hit. Take the map piece from the skeleton and leave for Scabb Island.

Go to the cemetery and open the crypt. Once inside look at all the coffins and look at the book of famous pirate quotations. Match Rapscallion's quote with the coffin inscriptions and open it. Take the ashes. Go to the Voodoo Lady and look at all the bottles. When you find the Ash-2-Life™ bottle pick it up. The Voodoo Lady will ask you for some ashes so she can whip up a proper potion. Give her the ashes. Get the Ash-2-Life™ from her and go back to the crypt. Use the Ash-2-Life™ on the ashes. Offer to turn off the gas at the weenie hut.

Go to beach and open the hut. Turn off the gas and return to the crypt. Use the Ash-2-Life™ on Rapscallion and he'll give you the map. Now you have all four pieces. Go to the cartographer give him the lens from the lighthouse and the map pieces. Go to the Voodoo Lady for him (to get the Love Bomb). Then go back to Wally. Look at the writing on the table, open the bag marked Juju, then go to the swamp. Get in the box.

....And that's where we must leave Monkey Island for now. The second and final part will appear in next month's TNT section. Stay tuned.

REALMS

This rather excellent wargame now has some rather excellent tips provided for it by Richard "TWO pieces of top software are on their way to me" Thompson of Aberdeen in Scotland. Take it away Richard...

CHOOSING YOUR REALM

For an easier time, choose a realm bordered with only one other. The reasons are obvious - you've only got one immediate enemy to worry about. If you fancy a real challenge pick a realm slap bang in the middle of the land!

STARTING OFF

Immediately access your cities and stock up on grain, expand land and build walls around the cities near the borders. In the early years of your reign recruit armies and train cavalry whenever recruits are available - you'll need them!

Access the cities every year and cycle through them, doing what needs to be done. As the realm grows larger and more complex it is easier to do this every three years or so (making sure that you stock three years worth of grain each time).

Set a reasonably high tax rate - don't be afraid of taking your citizen's money!

GENERAL HINTS

Don't dawdle on the playfield. If you want to think, pause the game or enter another screen.

When one of your city's population feels 'unbeatable' and their loyalty is 'absolute', levy the citizen's twice a year. This will hardly affect them (they'll feel 'determined' rather than 'unbeatable') and by the next year they will be back to 'unbeatable', in readiness to be levied again! Mugs!

If an enemy realm leaves it's capital relatively unguarded, go for the jugular and attack it straight away. Take the capital and the realm's cities and armies will become yours immediately. Unless a unit of troops is garrisoned at these cities it's likely that a few may revolt, but these will be small and isolated without any armies and therefore easy meat to recapture. Obviously, you should always keep your own capital well guarded.

If you have a large army assembled and you send it against an unguarded enemy city, the city may well surrender and join your realm for free rather than face the consequences. This not only avoids spilled blood but your new citizens will be totally loyal and ready to be levied immediately.

When a city surrenders after siege, raze it unless it's a capital or other tactically significant city such as a port. As well as providing a huge boost to your treasury, the enemy city ceases to be a threat for years. Capturing every city is not a good idea as many will revolt later and they also drain your valuable resources.

If a surrendered city is one you wish to retain, take over the city and leave a garrison of troops there to prevent revolution. As long as you run the city well and don't levy too much the inhabitants will soon come around to your way of thinking and become loyal subjects, thus enabling you to levy twice a year and recruit loyal troops.

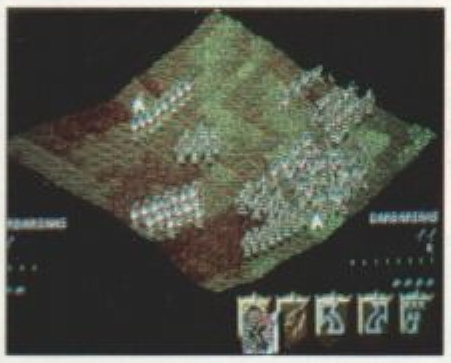
After conquering new cities, always check and adjust tax routes so that they lead back to your capital.

Get control of ports. They are immensely important tactically, especially in heavy sea-faring realms.

Never pay a tribute under siege unless it's your capital and it's a last resort. It's not worth the huge cost and the enemy troops will soon be back.

Don't waste time and especially money in alliances with other realms. No matter how much aid you give, if the opportunity arises to take one of your cities then you can be sure they'll take it.

If plague hits a city sort it out immediately by improving the city's health. Be prepared to levy heavily if need be - it's better than having plague spread through your realm!



Your Realm of Llorten

ARMIES AND FIGHTING BATTLES

Armies should consists primarily of four types of unit:

1. Heavy cavalry - Arm them with a war hammer or long sword and dress them in heavy head and body armour with a bronze shield. For the perfectionist, also arm them with spears or javelins to soften up the enemy before battle truly commences.

2. Heavy infantry - Arm and dress them as for cavalry. These are slow but superb in combat. Best used for defence or supporting and consolidating a cavalry charge.

3. Light infantry - Arm them with any weapon depending on the punch you want to give them and a missile weapon (usually a bow) and dress them in light armour. Try to keep these units out of combat unless necessary as they aren't too good. They're best used to rain arrows down on the enemy from afar. They're quite manoeuvrable.

4. Light cavalry - Arm and dress them as for light infantry. In battle, use as light infantry. However, use the units' super manoeuvrability to try to get behind the enemy and outflank them.

Always attack in a wedge formation and defend in a square formation. If controlling Dwarven or Amazon units who have no bow skills, so not bother with missile weapons. They are better hand-to-hand so equip them appropriately and charge!

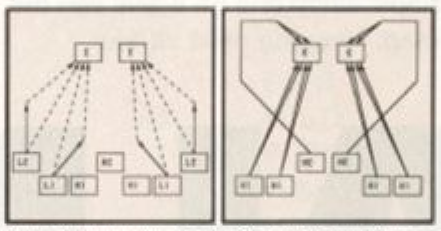
Missile-based armies favour a defensive stance. Weaken the enemy with missiles while they approach, then send your infantry units to the front to do the actual fighting.

When you've defeated the enemy and his units try to escape, attack them before they leave the battlefield. This will cause great damage to the enemy yet leave you unscathed, ensuring the enemy cannot regroup and fight another day.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

There are basically three situations you may find yourself in on the battlefield:

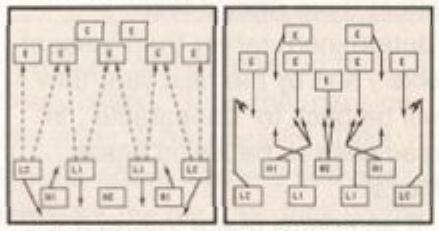
1. You heavily outnumber the enemy. (In this scenario you really can't lose unless you're totally incompetent!)



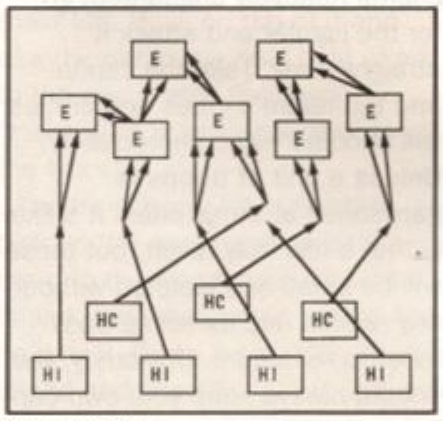
If you have missile troops, it may be possible to scare the enemy off without entering hand-to-hand combat. Concentrate fire on the same units for the best results.

If you have no missile troops, use your numbers advantage and attack en masse from all sides. Also use this tactic when your missiles have run out.

2. You and the enemy are about equal in strength.

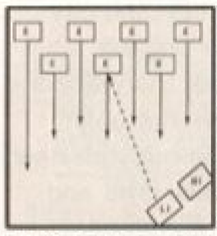


If you've got loads of missiles, DEFEND!



If not, ATTACK!

3. You are heavily outnumbered by the enemy.



The best advice here is to tactically withdraw (i.e. scarpèr). If you do have to scrap, though, draw your troops into one corner so that enemy units can only attack one at a time. Try to improve your odds with missile fire if available, and make sure your valiant last stand is on high ground to give you an advantage. Oh, and prey the gods are on your side.

Key to the above diagrams:
E - Enemy Unit
HC - Heavy Cavalry
LC - Light Cavalry
HI - Heavy Infantry
LI - Light Infantry
Solid Arrow - Move
Double Arrow - Charge (in wedge)
Dashed Arrow - Fire missiles

HEIMDALL

You want money by the sackful? You got it! Just go to the island where a guard asks you for a silver coin on entry, pay up and then find the shop. Give Heimdall all the gold and the adamantite axe. Sell the axe and confirm the sale. Then press sell again. As if by magic the axe will be resold to the dunce of a shop owner! Doh! Keep doing this until the shop is full then buy back the original axe. You should have made a profit of about 5000 Gold coins! Glumph!

Earl M., Fulwell, Sunderland

X 180
Y 197
14:14
Dist
LIFE
CREDITS
+00010
FUEL

You have boarded a helicopter
You have boarded a car

HUNTER

A short n' sweety here for Amiga and ST gamers. Looking for the General's Bunker? Try co-ordinates X=134, Y=237...

David Massey, Tarvin, Cheshire

SWITCHBLADE 2

Not really a cheat, but interesting none-the-less. On the Amiga/ST title screen, type in CHROME whn it tells you to hit fire to enter a secret sub-game. Have fun!

David Massey, Tarvin, Cheshire

CONSOLE CORNER

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Whooooo! Spooky! Hold down the Megadrive controller's A button on the title screen (when Sonic wags his finger) and press UP, DOWN, LEFT and RIGHT. Now hit START. You'll now be able to start on whichever level you want.

Also, when you've completed the game, give Dr Robotnik another whack as he tries to escape in his spaceship. Wait until he's left the screen then press and hold down A, then press and hold down B and then press and hold down C. Now release B and C (still holding down A) and press START. You can now use A to change Sonic into all kinds of weird characters and use C to reproduce him. A good laff is to change Sonic into a ring, reproduce him all around the screen then change him back into Sonic and pick up the rings.

Ben Booth, Heston, Middlesex

BATMAN

On the third level (the museum) of this Megadrive marvel go to the second chimney, the one with the axeman to the left underneath the batarangs. Kill the axeman and pick up the batarangs. Go back to the lift and wait until it goes down and up again. Pick up the batarangs that have reappeared and repeat until you have 99 batarangs. Complete the level without dying and on the next level the excess batarangs will be converted into missiles!

R. T. George, Castletown, Sunderland

CASTLEVANIA 2

A right Gameboy corker, and no mistake. But wouldn't it be nice to have pass codes to all the levels? It would?! Then read on...

SOUND TEST
Heart/Heart/Heart/Heart

CRYSTAL CASTLE
Blank/Candle/Heart /Heart

ROCK CASTLE
Candle/Heart/Heart/Sphere

PLANT CASTLE
Candle/Heart/Sphere/Sphere

CLOUD CASTLE
Heart/Heart/Sphere/Blank

DRACULA'S CASTLE 1
Heart/Sphere/Candle/Blank

DRACULA'S CASTLE 2
Heart/Candle/Sphere/Sphere

G. Richardson, Long Melford, Suffolk

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CHALLENGE

PLUS PLAY
BATTLE
ROYAL!!

WRESTLEFEST

IT'S
WRESTLE
MANIA

WRESTLING
BONANZA

WWF
WRESTLEFEST
INSERT COIN
CREDIT: 0
$tarline 26
$tarline

FEATURING
- ★ HULK HOGAN
- ★ 'JAKE THE SNAKE' ROBERTS
- ★ SGT SLAUGHTER
- ★ ANIMAL OF THE LEGION OF DOOM
- ★ EARTHQUAKE

ALSO FEATURING
- ★ BIG BOSS MAN
- ★ THE MILLION DOLLAR MAN-TED DI BIASE
- ★ MR PERFECT
- ★ HAWK OF THE LEGION OF DOOM
- ★ ULTIMATE WARRIOR

WWF
WRESTLEFEST
JAKE THE SNAKE ROBERTS
THE BIG BOSS MAN

WRESTLEFEST
INSERT COIN
CREDIT: 0

Jake the Snake
VS
DEMOLITION

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BUY-IN
WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION
TIME

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BUY-IN
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THE ACE

Not much fun these recessions, are they? With funds limited, that next top software purchase often seems impossibly far away. But help is at hand. You may not know it, but there's a huge pool of quality games software out there just waiting to be tapped by you for little more than the price of blank floppy! (Disk, I mean.) Hey! You guessed it - I'm talking about the topsy-turvy, cheap-n'-cheerful world of Public Domain software.

But just what is Public Domain software? Why is it so inexpensive? Are Shareware and Licenceware also part of the Public Domain? How do you get your grubby mitts on it? And, most importantly, is it actually any good?

Rest easy, gentle reader. The ACE PD File is here to mop your fevered brow, calm your worry-fraught mind and guide you oh-so-gently through the myriad of delights awaiting you on the PD circuit. In this, the first PD File, I'll be explaining just what some of those confusing buzzwords mean, telling you how you can get a slice of the action and pointing you in the direction of some cracking games software for your Amiga, Atari ST and IBM PC. There's lots to do and even more to see, so let's get going.

SHAREWARE, *SHMAREWARE*

The world of computing is a bewildering and frightening place for the uninitiated, a dense jungle of obscure buzzwords and acronyms, deterring all but the most committed from penetrating its murky secrets.

And the bizarre Zone of PD is as rife with techy jargon as any other. But fear not. As it 'appens PD is neither big, hard nor clever. Sit back and relax as we explain all in a friendly, easy-to-understand way.

- **Public Domain** (PD) software is a piece of non-copyrighted code that can be duplicated and distributed by anyone or anything completely free of charge or legal hassles. That's why the software from PD libraries is so cheap - all you're paying for is the cost of copying the stuff and sending it to you!
- **Shareware** is as freely copyable as PD, but the catch here is that if you find the program of use then you are requested to send the author(s) a registration fee - which, given the quality of some of the software available, is usually laughably small. You guessed it, it's "try before you buy" time!
- **Licenceware** cannot be copied freely like 'normal' PD. Some PD libraries are licensed (hence the name) to sell software, and the author receives a percentage royalty for every copy sold.
- And that's not all. There are loads of other silly names buzzing around the PD network - Addware, Bannerware, Giftware, etc, etc - but these tend to crop up rarely. If they appear in this column then they'll be explained on the spot.

SO HOW DO I GET IT?

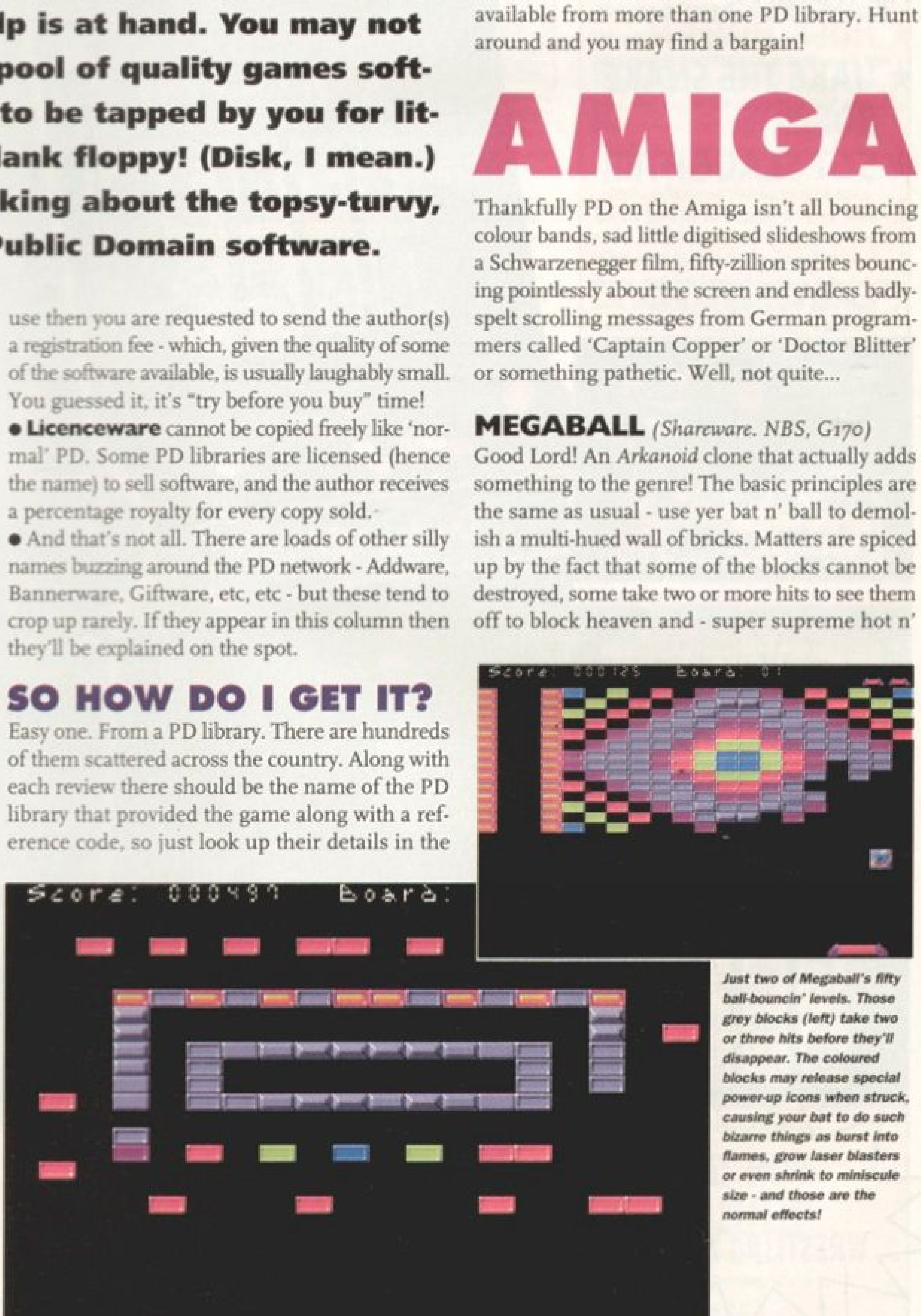
Easy one. From a PD library. There are hundreds of them scattered across the country. Along with each review there should be the name of the PD library that provided the game along with a reference code, so just look up their details in the 'Contact has been made...' box and call them for pricing and anything else you need to know. And remember that many of the titles reviewed are available from more than one PD library. Hunt around and you may find a bargain!

AMIGA

Thankfully PD on the Amiga isn't all bouncing colour bands, sad little digitised slideshows from a Schwarzenegger film, fifty-zillion sprites bouncing pointlessly about the screen and endless badly-spelt scrolling messages from German programmers called 'Captain Copper' or 'Doctor Blitter' or something pathetic. Well, not quite...

MEGABALL *(Shareware. NBS, G170)*

Good Lord! An *Arkanoid* clone that actually adds something to the genre! The basic principles are the same as usual - use yer bat n' ball to demolish a multi-hued wall of bricks. Matters are spiced up by the fact that some of the blocks cannot be destroyed, some take two or more hits to see them off to block heaven and - super supreme hot n'

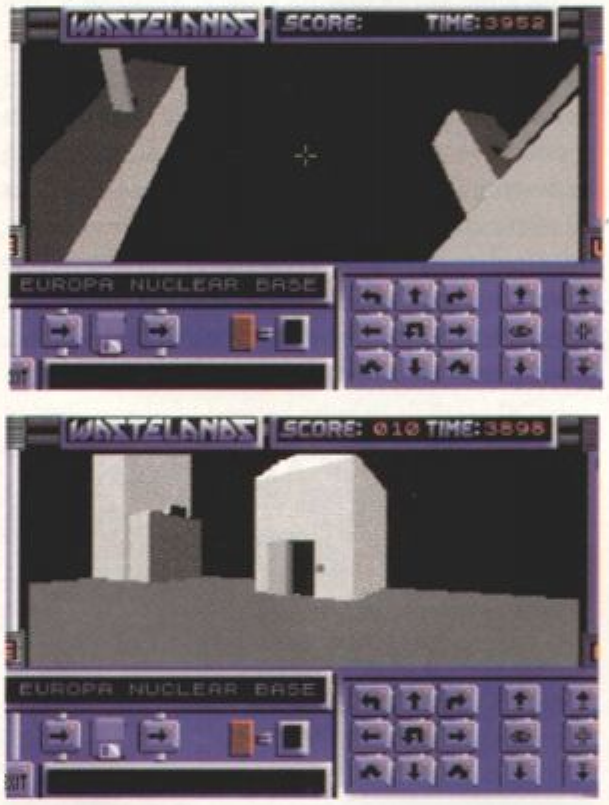


Just two of Megaball's fifty ball-bouncin' levels. Those grey blocks (left) take two or three hits before they'll disappear. The coloured blocks may release special power-up icons when struck, causing your bat to do such bizarre things as burst into flames, grow laser blasters or even shrink to miniscule size - and those are the normal effects!

PD FILE

spicy! - some release special power-up icons when hit. Business as usual, right? Wrong.

Sure, to play the game is no better or worse than any other of its ilk, but someone really had their thinking hat on when they dreamt up the various power ups. Not only are there tons of them but some produce very interesting results, like causing the blocks to start descending the screen Space Invader-like. Nasty. Megaball has lots of balls - fifty levels worth, in fact. Highly recommended.



Wastelands sees the player exploring the Europa missile base in search of the central computer that's preparing to launch a nuclear warhead.

WASTELANDS

(Public Domain. NBS, G206)

While programs written using Mandarin Software's *AMOS* are more prolific on the Amiga PD circuit than flies on a cow's arse, wannabe games programmers have yet to really get to grips with the advanced features of Domark/Incentive's *3D Construction Set*. However, if Wastelands is an indicator of the sort of thing we can expect, then we're in for some real treats.

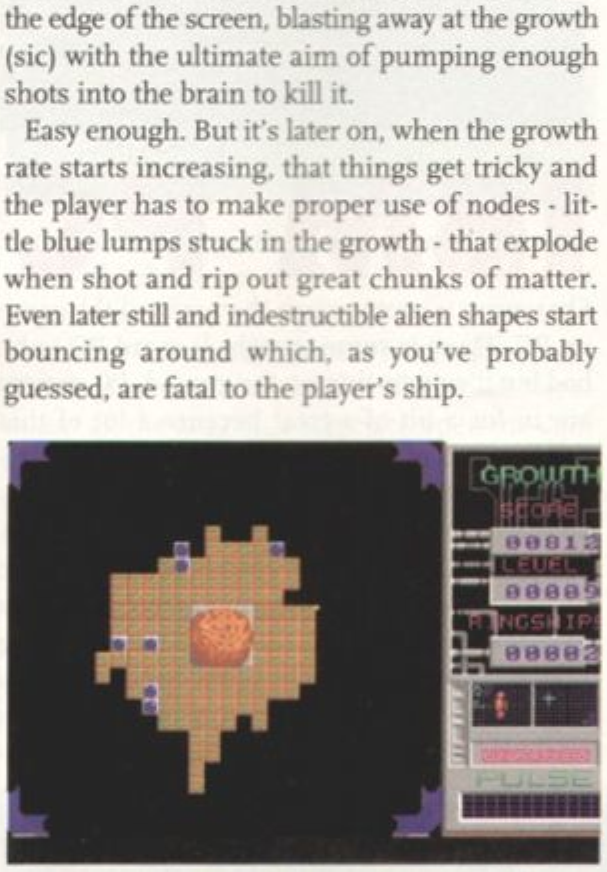
Deep in the Arizona desert, the super computer controlling the Europa nuclear facility has gone loco and is preparing to launch the multi-warheaded JOSHUA missile. It's down to the player to infiltrate the complex, locate the passcodes to the lower levels while dodging the auto-defence systems, and deactivate the computer.

Since Wastelands was written with a utility, it isn't the fastest 3D game you've ever seen, but it's more than fast enough. The building design is inspired, and the various buildings have an impressive sense of scale. Best of all, there's a good sense of atmosphere and tension. If you enjoyed *Castle Master* and its like then you'll get more than your money's worth here.

GROWTH *(Public Domain. NBS, G258)*

Growth is a classic example of the 'Simplicity = Excellence' school of thought. The basic premise is this: there's a giant brain in the middle of the screen which, slowly but surely, is spreading out its evil tentacles and filling the screen with its vile form. The player guides a small gunship around the edge of the screen, blasting away at the growth (sic) with the ultimate aim of pumping enough shots into the brain to kill it.

Easy enough. But it's later on, when the growth rate starts increasing, that things get tricky and the player has to make proper use of nodes - little blue lumps stuck in the growth - that explode when shot and rip out great chunks of matter. Even later still and indestructible alien shapes start bouncing around which, as you've probably guessed, are fatal to the player's ship.

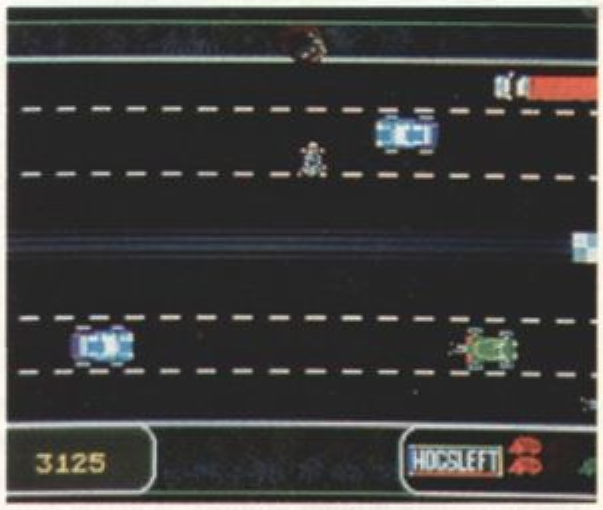


Can you keep the infestation at bay in Growth? Even if you can't you'll have a lot of fun trying!

To keep interest up, every few levels there's a bonus round, where the player has to keep a bouncing ball in play while trying to destroy the brain or shoot waves of blobs that tumble down the screen. With a seemingly infinite number of levels and hugely addictive gameplay, you'll soon find you're stuck on Growth.

ATARI ST

There are an amazing number of games written using utilities doing the ST PD rounds, the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* (SEUCK) and *STOS* being the two main favourites. While there's a lot of poorly-executed dross about, some of these home-written epics are incredibly good - can you believe that Ozone (Shareware. Available from Goodman Enterprise, GD1425), the superb platform game on this month's ACE Coverdisk, was written in *STOS*?



Hedge Hogger Scores
CONGRATULATIONS
TODAYS HIGH SCORE!
NEW HIGH SCORE!

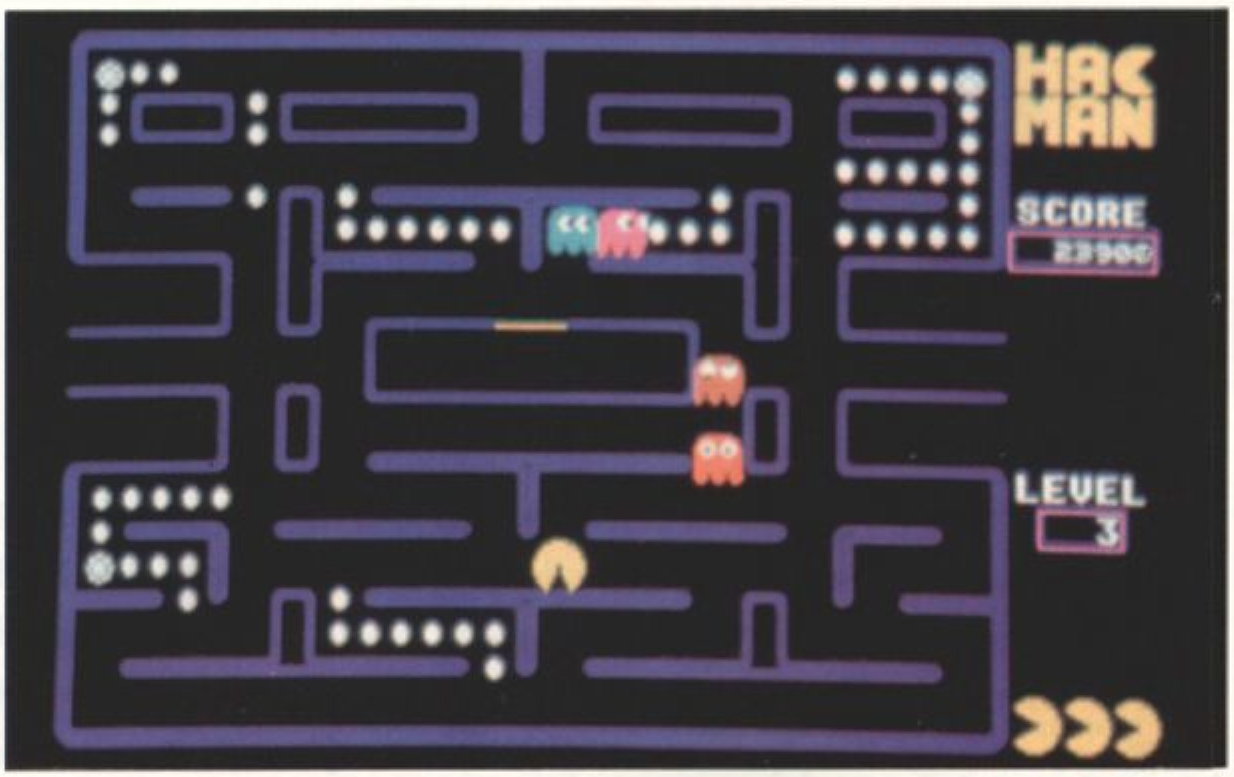
Hedgehogger is a fairly blatant Frogger rip-off. It's good fun, although the collision detection can be a little ropey at times.

HEDGEHOGGER

(Public Domain. Goodman Enterprise, GD651)

Hedgehogger is sick, sick, sick - in other words, it's a right laff. The player has six ickle hedgehogs who have to be guided across a busy motorway to the safety of their den. Although each basic-issue hedgepig is about as nippy as a slug on Valium, special Turboworms™ sometimes appears which, when chomped on, double the 'hogs speed.

Those with long memories will recognise this as a blatant rip-off of Atari's *Frogger* coin-op. It's all good fun with some nice touches, like the meaty splat when the spiky one gets run over, but it does



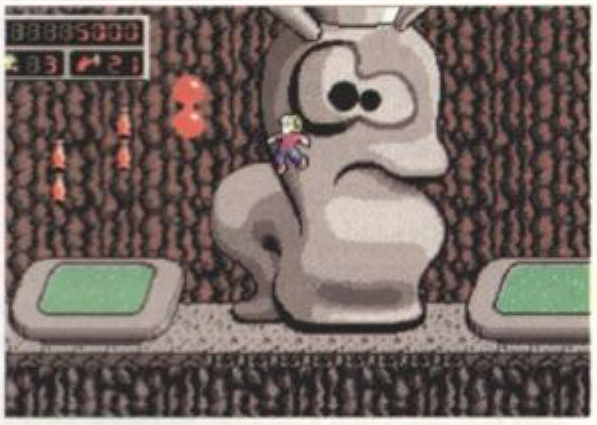
(Above) Hacman is one of the best Pacman clones out for the Atari ST. Although the first few levels are deadly dull, later on and it becomes excellently addictive.

get a little repetitive and the collision detection can be dodgy to day the least. Still, there are far worse ways to pass half an hour.

HACMAN *(Shareware)*

There are loads of Pacman clones around, but this one is better than most. Gameplay-wise there are no surprises - the player's yellow on-screen blob has to scoop up all the white blobs in a maze while avoiding the unwanted attentions of a bunch of multi-coloured blobs. If the yellow blob eats special giant flashing blobs then the tables are turned on the multi-coloured blobs and makes them the hunted but only for a short while.

The first few of the fifty levels are very discouraging - everything moves slowly and the ghosts are thicker than the chocolate on a Club. Thankfully the action soon hots up, with the ghoulies obviously getting a brain upgrade between levels, and then the addiction sets in. The animation though minimal is nicely done, especially the googly-eyed ghosts. It's a shame there's no sound - the munching sound is sorely missed. If you're on the look for a topper *Pacman* clone then look no further than this.



IBM PC

Shareware is pretty much the name of the game on PC. There is some straight-forward PD to be had but it's pretty thin on the ground. PC owners are in for a bit of a treat because a lot of this Shareware is of a very high standard indeed - presumably because many US companies use it as an interactive advert for their wares.

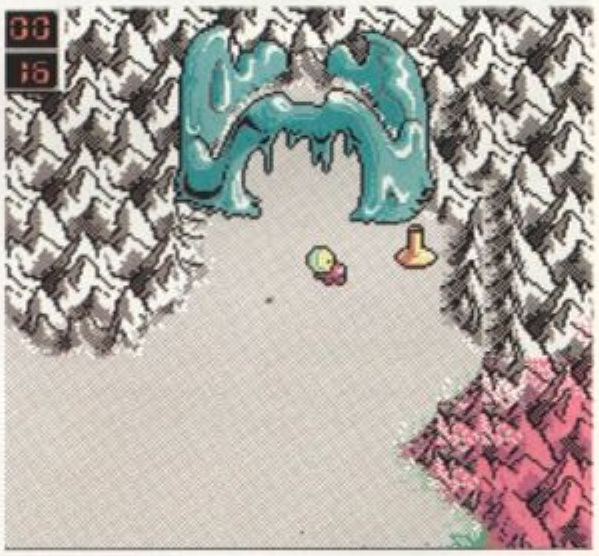
Top of the heap in this respect have to be Apogee Software, an American company whose name you may already be familiar with from the smashing *Commander Keen* game featured on last month's cover disk. Fans - ahem - 'keen' to get their hands on the full three-level game will no doubt be interested to know that Apogee have just entered into an agreement with Croydon-based Precision Software Applications who will now not only distribute Apogee's Shareware but also sell their complete games. PSA's address and phone number is given in the 'Contact has been made...' box.

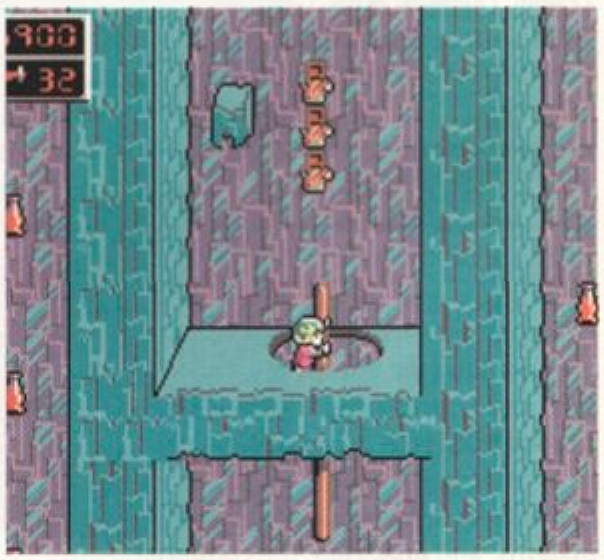
But *Commander Keen* is just one of PSA/Apogee's huge range of superb Shareware games, including two more of the Commander's outings. So, let's take a look at just three of them...

COMMANDER KEEN 4: SECRET OF THE ORACLE COMMANDER KEEN 6: ALIENS ATE MY BABYSITTER!

No, no, no - you haven't missed anything. Commander Keen 4 is in fact the sequel to the first Commander Keen Shareware game - the reason for the '4' is that in between there are two other non-Shareware games (as mentioned above). The second half of the adventure is to be found in Keen 5, but you have to pay to get that - it's worth it though.

The plots are as lunatic as ever. In Keen 4, the intrepid ten-year-old Commander picks ups a mysterious transmission from the evil Shikadi whilst fiddling with his super-duper space radio, which seems to imply that the foul aliens are planning to destroy the Galaxy! Keen travels to Gnosticus IV to consult the mighty Oracle to find out more, only to discover that the Guardians of the Oracle have been kidnapped by the Shikadi to prevent anyone learning more about their heinous plans. Now, guess who's got to rescue them...





CONTACT HAS BEEN MADE...

Here's the place to come for all those handy names, addresses and telephone numbers. (Remember, PD libraries - if you want to get listed here send us some of your topper games software for review. It's as easy as that!)

AMIGA

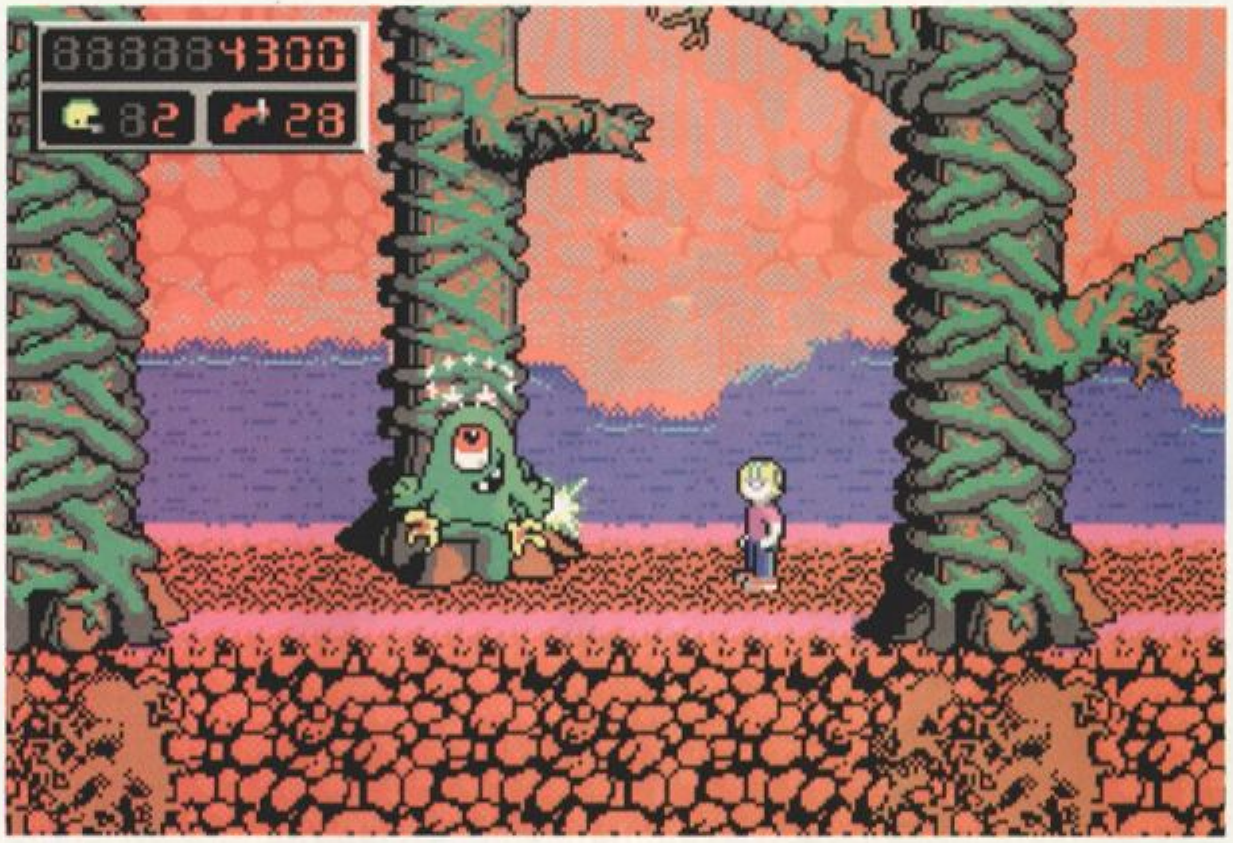
NBS, 1 Chain Lane, Newport, Isle of Wight
PO30 5QA. Tel: (0983) 529594.
Fax: (0983) 821599

ATARI ST

Goodman Enterprise, 16 Conrad Close,
Meir Hay Estate, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent
ST3 1SW. Tel: (0782) 335650.
Fax: (0782) 316132.

IBM PC

Precision Software Applications, 3 Valley
Court Offices, Lower Road, Croydon, Near
Royston, Herts FG8 0HF.
Tel: (0223) 208288. Fax: (0223) 208089.



Keen 6 opens with the Commander discovering that his baby sister Molly has been kidnapped by the slimy Bloogs from Fribbulus Xax. One trip to Xax later and Keen's back in familiar territory, scouring the planet for his missing sibling in an attempt to get her home before his parents do.

Like Keen 1, the games are a mixture of exploration and platform antics with Keen leaping around HUGE smooth-scrolling caves in his search for the Guardians in Keen 4 and Molly in Keen 6. Keen is armed with a stun laser and a pogo-stick, handy for reaching those out-of-reach platforms. Crystal keys are waiting to be found and switches waiting to be toggled that unleash all manner of effects

So, no surprises in the gameplay. What does surprise, though, is the sheer quality of the games. Although Keen 1 was great, these two are amazing. Honestly, if they were full-price releases I'd have no hesitation in giving them both the six-page Screentest™ treatment and bloody high marks to boot. As to which is the better... well, I found Keen 6 the slightly more enjoyable of the two, simply because a slightly higher element of adventuring - toggling switches, finding crystals, and so on - is required, but it's a close-run thing.

The 'feel' of both games is wonderful - they certainly gives the likes of Robocod and Mario a run for their money. They look good too - there are some superb creature designs which are marvelously animated, as are the detailed backdrops. Although the colour schemes are distinctly EGA, the bright look suits the jaunty gameplay well. Add massive game tasks and some infuriatingly catchy tunes, and you've got two games that come as welcome light-hearted relief to all those PC owners getting just a little jaded with endless flight sims and RPGs.

(Above and top right) Commander Keen rises once again, this time in a hunt for his baby sister Molly in Aliens Ate My Babysitter. Gameplay-wise it's business as usual - but what's wrong with that?

PAGANITZU: ROMANCING THE ROSE

The man with the hat is back! Forget Indy. What the world needs is a new breed of archaeologist, a heroic figure with the nouse to tackle ancient terrors in a modern time. Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce....

Alabama Smith.

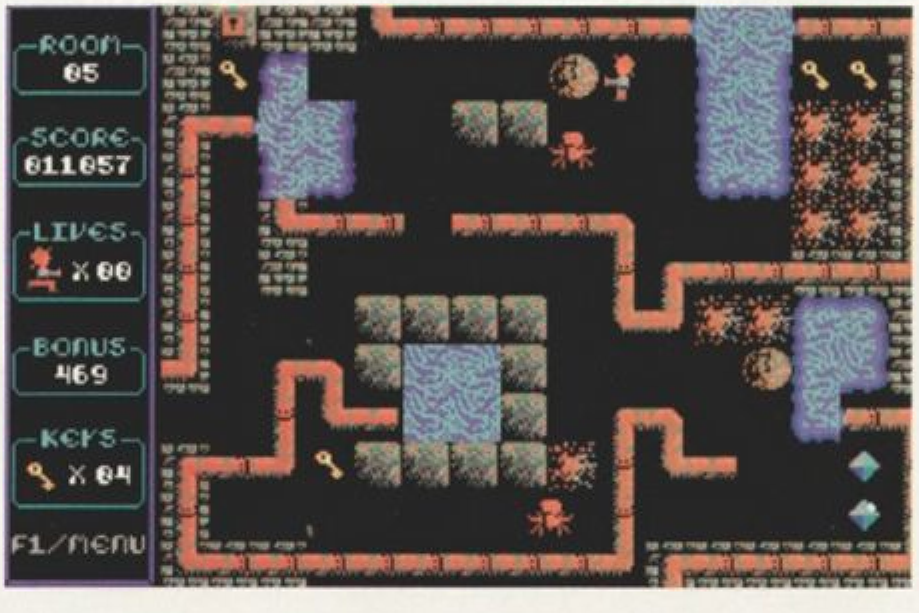
Okay, so it's not the hardest name ever, but our Alabama is actually something of a rollicking geezer. Renowned for his gripping escapades in perilous digs around the world, Alabama is about to embark on his greatest adventure yet - to recover the fabled treasures of the lost Aztec temple of Paganitzu.

It's an arcade puzzle game. The temple is split into single-screen chambers, and Alabama has to collect all the keys on a screen to open the door to the next while picking up precious bonus-point gems. The temple's denizens make things tougher than it sounds; snakes spit deadly venom if Alabama walks in line of sight of them, spiders shuffle around the corridors in pre-set patterns, and so on. Alabama, who seems to have left his gun and whip at home, can push loose blocks around to shield him from attack.

Although Paganitzu has the visual appeal of one of Noel Edmond's jumpers, gameplay-wise it's the equivalent of an Armani suit. The puzzles have just the right blend of ponderous thinking and fast action to keep you addicted. Although there are tons of levels, the ability to save games at any point means you can keep returning to the one that's stumping you without any fuss. Most excellent.

MORE! MORE! MORE!

Although the ACE PD File covers games, more games and nothing but games, remember that many PD libraries also stock a wide variety of Public Domain applications and utilities, such as spreadsheets, databases, word processors, art packages, music packages - you name it, chances are a PD library somewhere has got it. If you've got a problem give 'em a try - most PD libraries will be more than happy to recommend a program to suit your needs!



(Left above and left) Alabama Smith negotiates the torturous traps and pernicious perils of the Aztec temple of Paganitzu. Don't be fooled by the low-quality graphics - it's a right smart game.

the end

And that, as they say, is that. Because you have now arrived at the last page of the last issue of ACE Magazine. After this, there will be no more.

For just over four and a half years ACE has delivered a unique blend of news and reviews, interviews and features on all aspects of the computer entertainment scene. We hope that we've kept you amused and informed and that you've enjoyed reading the issues as much as we've enjoyed writing them.

But all good things come to an end. In the crazy tupsy-turvy world of computer games publishing, that's just the way it goes.

But hold hard! Choke back those tears! All is not lost. For there are plenty of magazines which are very nearly as witty and informative and stylish as ACE. In fact, we've got a dedicated magazine for every machine an ACE reader could possibly be interested in. So what's on offer?

PC Review is the place to go for all things MS-DOS. Games, applications, public domain, hardware information. All PC life is here!

Atari ST owners can look forward to a most excellent read in the form of ST Review, a completely new magazine dedicated to all things ST. Following much the same editorial format as CU Amiga, ST Review will cover all aspects of your machine, giving you all the info you need to get the very most from your ST.

And console owners have a positive wealth of choice with top quality magazines like Mean Machines and Megatech simply bursting with all that's hot in the world of the cartridge.

And last, but by no means least, Amiga games players will be most excellently catered for in the pages of The One for Amiga Games. Not only because it is a fine read dedicated 100% to extracting the maximum fun-points from your Amiga, but it's also our new home! So if you've enjoyed reading ACE for its reporting on the Amiga games scene, you'll know where to come and find us.

See you soon!

Jim & Dave & Gary & Jim

reviews directory

With a hearty cry of "Tra-la-laa!" and a mighty roar of "Hey-nonny-nonny!" for every honest Yeoman we proudly unveil the Reviews Directory. So unfurl the flags of all nations and get the servants to prepare a tasty meat feast (or a little peas/courgette special something if you're vegetarian) to keep you going as you get tuck into the THIRTY - yes, THREE-OH! - pages of hard-hitting, pull-no-punches, take-no-prisoners, other-words-joined-by-hyphens games information.

But let us spare a thought for those new readers out there who may be alighting on this highly-crafted and esceptionally well-written section for the very first time (and there's a first time for everyone, remember - yes, even you with bad haircut). "Why hence all the hoo-haa?" they cry. Simple. In the pages that follow you find all the basic information you'll ever need on every game released over the last THREE months. "Wow!" you cry. Yes, "Wow" indeed. And because you, the dear and loyal reader, demanded it, here are what those star ratings means in, ahem, full.

☆☆☆☆☆	**Excellent**
☆☆☆☆	**Very Good**
☆☆☆	**Above Average**
☆☆	**Poor**
☆	**Dismal**

New Releases:

4D Sports Drivin'
Awesome Golf
Dimension Force
Final Fantasy 2
John Madden Football
Jupiter's Masterdrive
Mercenary III
Mystical
Ninja Gaiden Shadow
Paperboy 2
Road Blasters
Roger Rabbit
RPM Racing
Rubicon
Sonic The Hedgehog
Super Fire Pro-Wrestling
Ultimate Golf
Wayne Gretsky's Ice Hockey 2

Still Available:

A320 Airbus
Action Pack
Another World
Aerostar
Alien Breed
Amnios
Another World
Baby Jo
Barbarian 2
Battle Isle
Birds of Prey
Breach 2
Bugs Bunny 2
Captain Planet
Castlevania IV
Celtic Legends
Centurion (Def. of Rome)
Choplifter 2
Cisco Heat
Civilization
Conan the Cimmerian
Cruise For A Corpse
Deathbringer
Devil Crash
Devious Designs
Double Dragon III
EA Hockey
Elf
Epic
Eye of the Beholder 2
F-15 Strike Eagle 2
F-22 Interceptor
Face Off
Fatal Rewind
Fighter Command
Final Blow
Final Fight
First Samurai
Flicky
Floor 13
Football Director 2
Formula 1 Grand Prix
Fuzzball
Galaga '91
The Games - Winter Challenge
Great Napoleonic Battles
Gunship 2000
Hard Drivin'
Hard Nova
Hare Raising Havoc
Heimdall
Hudson Hawk
Hunter
The Immortal
Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker
Knightmare
Lotus Turbo Challenge 2
Last Ninja 3
Leisure Suit Larry 5
Mad TV
Magic Garden
Martian Memorandum
Megafortress
Mega-lo-Mania
Megatraveller 2
Megatwins
Mercs
MiG29M Super Fulcrum
Might & Magic 3
Monster Business
Moonstone
Nebulus 2
Never-Ending Story 2
Outrun
Outrun Europa
Pacman
Pegasus
Pitfighter
Populous 2
Putt n' Putter
Railroad Tycoon
Realms
Rise of the Dragon
Robin Hood
Robocod
Robocop 3
Robozone
Rodland
Rugby - The World Cup
Sarakon
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
Seven Colours
Shuttle
Silent Service II
Sliders
Solitaire Poker
Smash TV
Steve McQueen
Westphaser
Strike Fleet
Superplex
Suspicious Cargo
Turtles - The Coin-Op
Thunderburner
Thunderhawk
Tip Off
Toe Jam & Earl
Traders
Under Pressure
Utopia
Volfied
Vroom
Willy Beamish
Wing Commander II
Wolfchild
World Class Rugby

new releases

4D SPORTS DRIVING

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

A very long time indeed after the PC original hit the streets, this Amiga version of the auto-effort from the people who wrote the superb 4D Sports Boxing really hits the spot.

Don't be put off by the crappy box artwork (a 'spacematic' car driven by silver men with laserbeam eyes, of you please). This is an excellent simulation of driving some of the most exciting cars in the world around some of the most ridiculous and hazardous tracks to ever come out of a games designer's head.

With some of the advantages that made Indy 500 such a laugh, such as a video playback mode and spectacular crashes, 4D Sports driving has all the elements that a fun driving game should have, with very little of the tedious drudgery that many have included in the name of realism.

The player can either race solo or against one of a host of computer controlled assailants. These electronic drivers have considerably more personality than the faceless robots driving drone cars found in other race games. Before each race against one of these maniacs, the player gets a breakdown of their particular psychological defects, whether they're speed freaks, bump merchants or whatever.

The action is executed in admirable 3D (the Fourth Dimension is YOU!) and even if the races themselves aren't that fascinating, the track designer section will provide you with enough entertaining pile ups to keep you coming back for more.

☆☆☆☆

AWESOME GOLF

Price **Lynx £29.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Atari**

It's a constant surprise to me how well golf games work on computer. You'd think the slow pace and highly physical nature of the sport just wouldn't make for a good computer game at all. But it nearly always seems to work well. Awesome Golf is the first golf game on the Lynx handheld and it's pretty good stuff.

The player can choose to play on either British, US and Japanese courses. As the player moves the cursor between windows choosing which one to play, the game tune changes subtly to reflect the country currently selected. Nice. There's also some cutesy speech during the game which is very entertaining.

Although there are some nice 3D views when the golfer takes a swing, the actual mechanics of the game are handled in 2D. Each shot begins with a plan view of the current green. The player can scroll about it using the cursor pad and even zoom in and out thanks to the marvel of the Lynx's sprite manipulating hardware.

Using a small cursor the player aims the shot, then chooses a club. Annoyingly there's no on-screen information to tell you the maximum range of each club so you have to keep referring to the instruction booklet. Taking a swing is achieved by the familiar hitting the button when a swiftly moving marker is over the shot power you want then hitting the button again to give the ball left or right snap.

While Awesome Golf doesn't exactly set a new standard for computer golf games, it's a classy addition to the genre and is a recommended to all sports-loving Lynx owners.

☆☆☆☆

DIMENSION FORCE

Price **Super Famicom £39.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Asmik**

Cor! What with helicopter mania set to sweep the country over the next few months, we were more than a little excited with the prospect of a full-blown helicopter romp on the Famicom. Indeed, the design guys seem to have got their act together, dishing up exactly the right sort of out-of-the-sun, Apocalypse Now imagery for the front of the box.

Unfortunately for both them and us, the people who have actually programmed the game seem to have been stuck in some sort of time warp for the last five years, and are perfectly content to dish up a game which makes Slap Fight look sophisticated.

Now don't get us wrong, it's perfectly acceptable to produce a top-down scrolling shoot out these days. But there does need to be some degree of innovation, doesn't there? Alas, there is none.

The player launches from his aircraft carrier in one of the most crappy and cynical scaling routines I've witnessed and the has the pleasure of flying over a stripy sea with rocks (or are they clouds, it's tricky to tell) scrolling down at regular intervals. Then, surprise surprise, the player is assaulted from all directions from a bunch of clumsily drawn and utterly unimaginative planes.

It's unfortunate that Dimension Force just happens to come along after the cut-off date, but this sort of ghastly trash just doesn't cut it any more.

☆

FINAL FANTASY 2

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Role Playing Game**
Publisher **Square Software**

The Final Fantasy series arrives on the Super Nintendo in style. In Final Fantasy II, the player is whisked off to a mythical dungeons-n'-dragons world as Cecil, commander of a giant airship battle fleet charged by the King of Baron to recover a set of magical crystals. But when Cecil refuses to do the King's dirty work any longer, he is cast out on an even more perilous mission. All this is told by an elaborate introductory sequence prior to play, and then it's up to you to journey off into the wastelands not just to undertake your mission but also to find out what sinister treachery the king seems to be up to.

Along the way you're accompanied by your pal, Kain, and more characters turn up and join your party as the quest progresses. The main game is presented is top-down cutesy format, with squat little characters and bright, colourful scenery. The simplistic nature of the graphics tends to belie the game's sophisticated nature. It may look infantile and shallow, but in fact it's bigger and more depthy than the vast majority of computer-based RPGs - and it's much easier to get into and learn too.

I'd much rather play this than some stuffy, pretentious AD+D product any day of the week.

For its terrific user-friendliness, depth of gameplay and sheer size and scope, Final Fantasy II gets a definite thumbs-up as one of the tidiest console RPGs to date - even the super-cute graphics do make it a little difficult to take things seriously at times. Definitely recommended.

☆☆☆☆

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL

Price **Super Famicom £39.99**
Genre **Sports Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Whooaaaa! Touchdown! That's right, dudes! Madden Mania sweeps the UK in a crazy fit of football bonkerness! And in readiness for the arrival in a couple of months of the official UK Super Nintendo, lots of grey import dealers across the country have taken the rather appealing opportunity of stocking this version of the game that everyone is calling 'John Madden Football'

And not a bad version it is too. Offering the player the chance to be both quarterback (who gets to call the 'plays') and every other bugger in the team in a sort of Kick-Off style fashion. That is, the player throws the ball himself and the computer then automatically switches his control to the man who is nearest and most capable of 'receiving'.

Alternatively, once the player has called the play, he can leave the computer-controlled players to try their best to carry out his instructions. This rarely works as well as you may expect, but is often a better option than meddling and screwing things up yourself.

As you would expect from the Electronic Arts Sports Network, there are more features than you can wave a stick at, allowing you to choose from 29 teams, decide what the weather is going to be like and decide if you want to practise, play a regular season or opt for league play.

It's not quite as slick as the Megadrive version, but still good enough to take the crown as one of the finer games available on the SNES

☆☆☆

JUPITER'S MASTERDRIVE

Price **Amiga/PC/ST £7.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Action Sixteen**

It's a rare occurance indeed that a budget game gets to appear in ACE. But for Jupiter's Masterdrive, we just had to make an exception. Ages ago when UBI soft released the title, it was warmly received by reviewers but sort of got washed away in the spate of top down driving scrollers on the market. Now, at a mere £7.99, the game stands a chance to be a budget scorcher, since there are very few decent top downers around at the moment.

The players have to steer an assortment of vehicles (hover craft, formula one cars, hot rods and the like) around a bunch of different tracks, each taking place on a different planet or something.

Distinguishing Masterdrive from most games of the ilk is the fact that the players can actually blow each other up by using handy roof-rack mounted cannons.

Most of the courses are well designed and provide thrilling racing, but two problems quickly emerge. The first is that in two player mode, the scale of the track contained in the tiny screens is simply too large and the player can't see where he's going. The second problem is that some tracks are utterly impossible, like the ice track which must be negotiated on hovercraft. Bear in mind that many courses have pinball-style bumpers which rebound the craft across the track, and you can see that this can become a bit of a bind.

Still you can opt to avoid this course, so it's not that bad. And the roistering compos you can have with your mates are most enjoyable.

☆☆☆

MERCENARY III

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Novagen**

Since the publication of the original Mercenary on the Commodore 64 back in 1986, the 3D vector-driven adventure game, and those that have followed it, have become cult classics. Since the original, we've had The Second City (essentially a data disk for the first game), the excellent Damocles and now the trilogy is drawn to a close (probably) by the cleverly-titled Mercenary III (subtitled The Dion Crisis). It's bigger, better and tougher than those that have preceded it, with the 3D filled-vector environment that author Paul Woakes is famous more now more sophisticated and believable than ever before.

This time around, the player travels between planets in a bid to unravel a top-level political conspiracy. Interaction with characters now plays a major part in the adventuring, but mostly the gameplay will be familiar to Mercenary fans - travel around collecting objects and using them in the right way. It's not particularly sophisticated stuff, but the realistic environment and the multitude of things to do give the impression that it is, and that's fine by me.

Of course, anybody who enjoyed the earlier Mercenary games won't need to be told that this is right up their street also. Unfortunately, the game's innovative way of doing things, its tricky puzzles, weird sense of humour and overall feel isn't for everybody's taste, so newcomers may want to check it out before taking the plunge. It's definitely worth looking out for, though, as those who have the patience and take the time to get into the game will find it thoroughly absorbing.

☆☆☆☆☆

MYSTICAL

Price **Amiga/PC/ST £7.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Action Sixteen**

Hoorah, what a jolly little game this is. Originally released by Infogrames, this off-the-wall shoot'em-up never really received the recognition it deserved. Now it's out at a more pocket-friendly price, though, it should be able to reveal its delights to a much wider audience.

The player's cast as an apprentice magician who, just before taking his final exams, carelessly mislaid all of the Great Wizard's spells and magic potions. Now, to even stand a chance of earning his pointy hat, he's got to go into the magical lands and retrieve the lot of them. What follows is a slow-moving but nevertheless addictive vertical shoot'em-up with the wizard trotting up the screen collecting the lost spells and doing battle with the myriad of nasties that accost him. Hardly surprising for a game of French origin, it's very bizarre indeed, with lots of completely unexpected aliens (ponytailed girls and big fat milkmaids?) and plenty of on-the-side graphical surprises.

As the wizard progresses, the spells he collects can be used like power-ups against the evil hordes. The aim of the game is essentially to reach the magic pentangle at the end of each level, so as to be transported in a shower of pixie-dust to the next. Truth be told, there's really not that much to it, but it's a great laugh, especially with two players (the second joystick controls a Golem character that jumps on enemies and crashes it). It looks smart, plays just as well and comes heartily recommend to anyone with eight jangly pound coins burning a hole in their pocket.

☆☆☆☆

NINJA GAIDEN SHADOW

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Beat-'em-up**
Publisher **Temco**

h no! Not another Ninja Gaiden game! To be fair, this one is better than most. Sure, it's the usual old slam-bang, thank-you-ma'am martial arts action that we all know (too well) and love (sometimes), but the presentation and the graphic quality lift it a little out of the ordinary.

The smart though badly translated intro explains the plot. The evil Demon Emperor Gulf has plans to enslave the whole world's population (starting with New York, would you know it). And with his mighty dark army to back him up it looks like he going to do it, too. That is, until Ryu Hayabusa, last of the noble Dragon Clan, appears on the scene to dispense sword-based justice over five scrolly levels.

As well as the ability to run, jump

and slash, Ryu can also monkey swing along the underside of ledges, shoot a grappling rope up in the air to climb up to lofty platforms and also unleash a special dragon's flame secret weapon if he's collected the right power ups (oh, the game's got them as well).

Yes, as I said earlier the game scores zilch for originality, but it looks superb (there's some great parallax on level one) and plays even better. Beat-'em-up fans disappointed by the low quality of Double Dragon 2 would do well to look here for their thumpin' thrills instead.

☆☆☆☆

PAPERBOY 2

Price **Super Famicom / PC £39.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Look out! He's back, with an all new route! And, well, that's just about it actually. Paperboy mania swept the arcades and homes of America when the first game appeared way back in 1986. The ker-razy antics of the adolescent delivery boy captured the imagination of the nation, and now fans of the original can enjoy this sequel.

Well, I say sequel. Extension would perhaps be a more appropriate term. There's nothing new in this game that was missing from the original except the ability to ride in both diagonal directions, as opposed to up and left in the first. The routine is still exactly the same; the Paperboy (or girl) gets to ride a number of streets, delivering papers to the correct houses in traditional American style on the back of his BMX, avoiding all those zany problems which anyone who has taken a Saturday job at their newsagent will be only too aware of. Fierce dogs attack the Paperboy and trucks run him over. You get the picture.

Graphics weren't the strong suit of the original, and they're equally sparse here, looking pretty sad compared to most current releases. But then visual appeal isn't the point of the Paperboy games. Instead, their fast gameplay and humour kept people coming back for more. And this title just about manages to deliver an acceptable amount of both.

☆☆☆

ROAD BLASTERS

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Tengen**

Tengen really are the nostalgia kings. While other softcos are converting the latest state-of-the-art coin-ops to Sega's 16-bitter, Tengen are quite content to release conversions of games you could probably buy in their original arcade cabinets for about the same price. Just recently we had Pacmania, now we've got Road Blasters and there are plenty more 'blasts from the past' in the pipeline.

Road Blasters comes as a welcome relief from the stacks of scrolling shoot-'em-ups and platform games. (Just why is the Megadrive so curiously lacking in the driving game department? The only other one I can think of is Super Monaco GP.) As the name suggests, the player drives along a road and... um... blasts things.

The accent is definitely on the blasting. The player's car, which sits at the bottom-middle of the screen, accelerates to top speed automatically and the player simply has to steer it left and right, strafing unsafe road users and roadside gun turrets with his bonnet-mounted machine gun. Super mega whopper weapons are occasionally dropped off (literally) by a jet that swoops down and hovers over the car briefly.

Your appreciation of Road Blasters on the Megadrive will be near identical to that of the coin-op - they're identical. Personally I find the action repetitive and too mindless to be enjoyable for longer than about fifteen minutes, but there are probably many who disagree and think this is the best game ever. At least, that's what Tengen must be hoping.

☆☆☆

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT?

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Capcom USA**

Ark! Judge Doom is planning to ruin Toon Town and has already killed the mayor just to prove that he means business. Roger must rescue Toon Town from the terrible fate that Doom has in store and at the same time rescue his wife Jessica from an evil kidnapping plot. And how does he go about all this? He scrolls around Toon town in a sort of graphic adventure cum shoot-out, that's how!

Actually it's not that bad, and there's enough variety in the arcade sequences to make it worthwhile. The horrible weasel henchmen of Dr Doom chase poor Roger around the screen and take pot shots at him, popping out of manhole covers and the most unusual places in order to do him down.

Real fans of the movie will be pleased with the representation of Roger and the lighthearted nature of the whole thing, but real gamers may find that it's a bit lacking in the action department.

There's a reasonable amount of adventuring to do, although this really consists of simply taking an object from one place to another in order to be told to take a different object somewhere else.

The graphics throughout are amusing enough and reminiscent of the film in a rather blocky, black and white sort of way, and the whole thing adds up to just about enough fun per p. And anyway, it's a nice change to see Capcom handling a cutesy product after their interminable run of ball-busting combat shoot-outs.

☆

RPM RACING

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Interplay**

Offroad racing is very much the 'in' thing with driving game programmers of late, and you could well expect the latest product to cash in on the craze to be the best so far, what with it being on the Super Nintendo and all that. Unfortunately, the many faults of RPM (it stands for Radical Psycho Machine, not Revs Per Minute) Racing prove beyond doubt that it doesn't matter how sexy a console may be, the games on it can still be a technical and gameplay abortion.

RPM Racing is very similar in style and presentation to the GameBoy's Super RC Pro-Am, reviewed in January. But whereas the handheld game was fast, smooth and controllable, RPM Racing distinctly lacks these qualities. Four cars do battle over a series of eight-way scrolling isometric-perspective tracks, bouncing over hills and ramps, performing hairpin turns and generally bashing into each other. Much has been made of the high-resolution graphics, which look vaguely like the Amiga's HAM mode and have allowed for some very pretty definition and light-shading on the vehicles as they bounce about. Unfortunately, it seems the price we pay for all this technical wizardry is horribly jerky scrolling, sluggish, almost undetectable car control and, on the whole, slow and frustrating racing.

Presentation-wise, RPM is slick, offering various car modifications, 120 tracks with 24 difficulty levels and even a course designer. These, however, are all pretty pointless additions if the main thrust of the game isn't up to much, and so ultimately RPM Racing comes over as the sort of game you'd really like to have a lot of fun with, but just can't because it's so steadfastly unplayable. A real shame.

☆☆

RUBICON

Price **Amiga/ST £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **21st Century Ent.**

In the near future a bizarre nuclear accident in the Soviet Union (ho ho, not a very timely scenario) smothers an area 300 miles square with intense radiation. As a result, the wildlife in the area has been horribly transmutated into... well, horrible transmutations. And guess who's job it is to go in and sort it out? Right first time!

Once again the barrel of game scenarios has been well and truly scraped as an excuse for this latest blaster from the reborn Hewson. It's a pretty unconventional game in the way it's presented - rather than being a constantly-moving affair, the little fella under your control has to deal with the threat on each screen before he scrolls from left to right into the next bit of terrain. It... sort of works in its own way. It lends a more relaxed, take-things-in-your-stride air to the action, without really making it seem boring. The shooting action is pretty frantic, particularly when extra weapons have been collected, although sometimes the control system gives the impression that success depends more on luck than judgement.

Graphically it's OK, although some of the sprites are pretty crudely defined, and the colour scheme is rather drab and depressing - as befits a post-nuclear landscape, I suppose. There's something about the game - or rather not - that means that, although it looks like it should, it doesn't deliver that all-important playability 'kick'. It tries hard enough, with plenty of variety in the levels and action, but nevertheless it falls just short of the targets it sets for itself. Try before you buy.

☆☆☆

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Sega**

Well, they said it couldn't be done - but Sega had to go and prove them wrong. Sega's would-be Mario beater has made it onto the Game Gear and it's an impressive achievement. It's so impressive, in fact, that you'll think you're playing a handheld Megadrive! (Okay, so I know that that's a bit of a naff statement but it really is true.)

Everything you remember from the Megadrive game has been reproduced exactly the same but smaller - the oh-so-colourful graphics, the twee tunes, the simple yet addictive gameplay and the amazing speed are all there. The action's so fast that there are times when the Gear's blurry screen makes it's near impossible to see what the Hell is going on! Owners of both a 'Drive and a Game Gear will be pleased to hear that the map layouts are, as they say on TV, "All-New", so if you've beaten the Megadrive game then you'll find new challenge here.

But not much. In all respects Sonic is a classic games bar one - it's just far too easy. Seasoned game pros are likely to have this one cracked well inside a week of solid play. Still, it's definitely one of the best looking carts ever seen on the Game Gear and as long as you don't mind the short-lived nature of the fun then it's well worth your dosh.

☆☆☆☆

SUPER FIRE PRO-WRESTLING

Price **Super Famicom £49.99**
Genre **Beat-'em-up**
Publisher **Human Creative Group**

Conveniently hitting these shores on import at more or less the same time as the WWF craze, this latest Famicom product must surely rank as one of the smelliest to date. On paper and on screen it looks and sounds great - 3D isometric ring, big musclebound characters slugging it out, single-player and tag-team options, loads of different moves... mouth watering yet? Well it needn't be, because Super Fire Pro-Wrestling is about as playable as a stale watermelon wrapped in a wet towel.

So what's so bad about it then? Well, it's difficult to know where to start, really. The wrestlers themselves shuffle about the ring in such an unconvincing manner that they don't even look like they're walking on the canvas. They seem to float about a foot off the ground, with their legs kicking back and forth in a vaguely walk-like manner. When the two fighters meet, they grapple in an equally unrealistic fashion while the players hammer away on their buttons to try and get a hold and execute a move. Theoretically there's lots to do, but the graphics are so poorly defined and the controls so unresponsive that, bar flashes of luck, it's virtually impossible to do anything but the most basic moves. Maybe it would have been a bit easier to get to grips with if the on-screen messages had been in English, but they're not so it isn't.

No doubt some hardened wrestling fans will throw caution to the wind and snap this up, but a much better plan is surely to wait a while and see what emerges over the next few months - there's already an offiical WWF game on the way which promises to be a lot better. Whatever you do, don't waste your hard-earned money on this claptrap.

☆

ULTIMATE GOLF

Price **Amiga ST/PC £7.99**
Genre **Sports Game**
Publisher **GBH Gold**

Well, hardly. Since Gremlin's Greg Norman-licenced game claimed to be the last word in golf simulations, it's been proved wrong many times with the likes of PGA Tour Golf, Links and the excellent Microprose Golf all beating it hands-down in the realism and fun stakes.

But that's not to say that 'Ultimate Golf' is bad. Far from it, and now that it's out at a more respectable price it should be looked at seriously by any avid on-screen golfers who haven't already done so. As golf games go, it's certainly one of the most comprehensive on the market, but some sloppy presentation, and maybe a little over-enthusiasm to put in so many factors, has led to it being rather unfriendly and difficult to get to grips with.

Actually, the game's slightly deceptive about how much there really is to it. There may be all these lovely options and variables, but there are still only two courses to play on, and that's pretty poor by the standards of other games, which offer anywhere between four and six. Any golf game's longevity is determined by the number of courses available, and two just doesn't cut it, I'm afraid.

Whatever, there's a good eight quid's worth of golf action here for those who like their sport sims a bit on the intensive side - even though anybody looking for a seriously good introduction to the genre would be better pointed in the direction of PGA Tour or Microprose Golf.

☆☆☆

WAYNE GRETZKY'S ICE HOCKEY 2

Price **Amiga /PC £25.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Bethesda**

Hey! Hey! Hey! It's Waaaaaaayne Gretzky! Boy! With his name on the game you know it's got to be good. Well, actually I don't know who the heck he is and I wish I didn't know much about this game. It bored me stiffer than a corpse left on an ice block.

The accent is firmly on simulation. (A bit of a bad move this, in my opinion, as done correctly ice hockey would make a great supra-violent action game.) Before matches the player can fiddle about with his team member's stats to his heart's content, training them up, booting duff players out and recruiting college rookies in. Chances are, though, that you'll not want to because all this stats jiggery-pokery is carried out on some of the drabbest menu screens I've seen this side of a spreadsheet.

The actual hockey matches are played out on top-viewed horizontally-scrolling ice rink, where tiny emaciated groups of pixels gyrate about in a vain attempt to simulate the ruckin' high-octane sport that is ice hockey. Even with the woeful graphics this could've been decent fun, but the poor control makes it feel like you're controlling somebody else controlling the players rather than being in the hot seat yourself.

Drab, dull and no fun to play, this is one hockey game that should be iced as soon as possible.

☆☆

And there we have it. A rather small number of new releases for a whole month, we agree, but that's very much the way of things in the spinning maelstrom of light and power known as the computer industry. One minute you expect something to happen and the next minute, it doesn't. Or maybe it does. It all depends on what you least expect at any given time.

Still available

A320 AIRBUS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Thalion**

You what? Alright, it's not as if we have any problem flying high in an F-16 or blowing up radar installations in a state-of-the-art stealthfighter - but the A320 Airbus? Is somebody pulling our pilsner? Well, apparently not, as this is one of the biggest releases from German software house Thalion in quite a while. Rather akin to a computerised Jim'll Fix It, the game allows the player to be an airline pilot for a day - well, for however long he likes, really - at the controls of the little-known A320 jetliner.

As anybody who knows anything about aviation at all will expect, A320 Airbus is no simple game. Passenger jets are impossibly more complicated than the fighter planes that have mainly been the subject of simulations in the past. Thalion's game has attempted to simulate the spaghetti-like complexity as accurately as possible - and for the most part it succeeds, although this hyper-realistic approach is unlikely to appeal to the majority of flight-sim gamers. All those knobs, dials and readouts may be a bit too much for the average Joe Shmoe.

A320 Airbus isn't just about flying about a bit, though. Oooh, no. Players get to create their own pilots, take part in training or active duty, work out flight plans and generally make their way up the ladder of commercial aviation. For those that find this sort of thing appealing, there's no doubt that A320 Airbus is actually very good indeed. It's professionally-produced, apart from the occasionally ropey graphics, and though it's not exactly immediate or instinctive, the rewards are there to be had for players willing to plough the manual and learn all the ins and outs. The only problem is, I can't quite imagine who's going to be that interested, when you think about all the other, considerably more action-orientated, flight games on the market today. It's just horses for courses, I suppose.

☆☆☆☆

ACTION PACK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Compilation**
Publisher **Action 16**

Wot a bargain! Ten games - *Colorado, Cosmic Pirate, Eliminator, Fast Lane, Hostages, Maya, On Safari, Rotor, Sherman M4, Targhan* - for twenty-five quid! Okay, we'll be honest and admit that they're all getting a bit long in the tooth now, and more than a couple of the games on offer here are real Xmas turkey material (*On Safari*, in particular, should be plucked, stuffed with Paxo and bunged in the oven for a good five hours as soon as possible).

However, *Cosmic Pirate* (a supah brill multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up), *Eliminator* (a 3D shoot-'em-up cum driving game) and *Hostages* (a multi-part arcade adventure) more than compensate, and would make a superb value compilation on their own. The other games are poor to middling in quality, but for the price you really can't complain. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

AEROSTAR

Price **GameBoy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Vic Tokai**

What do you get if you cross a platform game with a vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up? A bit of a bloody mess, that's what. Aerostar is a seven-stage blaster where the player has to guide a spaceship along an enemy-held highway. The player can fly into the air for a very limited time to avoid ground fire and hop over gaps in the road, but this makes him vulnerable to attacks from the air. And, of course, there's a plethora of juicy power-ups to be collected along the way that turn the player's craft from something only a little more threatening than a slap in the face into the starship world's equivalent of the 'King of the Beach'.

The idea of combining blasting and bouncing is theoretically good, but unfortunately in practice it doesn't work so well. The player 'jumps' by holding down one of the GameBoy buttons, and the longer the button is held down the longer the jump. Thing is, the GameBoy's design makes it difficult to fire at the same time without taking one finger of the jump button, resulting in the ship plummeting into an abyss. And as the road starts narrowing, and the need for jumping becomes more frequent and the enemy's attacks become more vicious, this becomes particularly annoying.

As it stands, Aerostar is a nice stab at something a bit different, only marred by the slightly clumsy implementation. Worth a look, though, if you're interested by the sound of it.

☆☆☆

ALIEN BREED

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Team 17**

Alien Breed can best be described as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It grafts Aliens atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay to create an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner. One or two players can take part simultaneously, and their job is to run around the six plan-viewed maze-like levels of a monster-infested space station, blasting seven shades of slime out of anything that crawls, slithers or lurks.

Fortunately the problem that always afflicted *Gauntlet* (i.e. though fun, there was no real aim to playing apart from scoring points) has been averted by giving the players a task to complete on each level (normally of the 'find a location and blow it up' nature). Okay, so it's not exactly lifting the game into Arcade Adventure territory, but it's provides enough of a goal to keep the player coming back for more.

The addictive gameplay is backed up by some super-slick scrolling and graphics (although the animation is a little perfunctory), and the term 'arcade-like' is very appropriate here. Throughout the use of sound to create atmosphere and tension is superb, especially when the station's self-destruct sequence is kicked in and the player has to find the exit before the place blows. The only real gripe is that given that the game is for 1Mb Amigas only, you can't help feeling that something slightly more ambitious could have been attempted. But as it stands this is the best straightforward blast for months, and that's a good enough recommendation for anyone.

☆☆☆☆

AMNIOS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Hooray! *Defender* for the 90s! Well, that's the idea. The shame is it doesn't *quite* work.

Amnios is a plan-viewed multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up. The player zips around the surfaces of ten living planets in his ship, zapping the bad guys and rescuing the trapped humans. By shooting certains pods the player can upgrade his ship with better weaponry.

And that's it. It's that simple. Of course, with this sort of game you're not looking for depth - you're looking for action. And in this respect Amnios does pretty well. The scrolling is smooth, sound suitably raucous, and the graphics have an attractive organic/mutated look to them.

Trouble is, I didn't really feel much compulsion to work my way through the first world, let alone the tenth. Control over the ship isn't quite as 'reflexive' as it should be, and this detracts from the fun badly. Not my cup of tea, but it may well be yours. Give it a look.

☆☆☆

ANOTHER WORLD

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **US Gold**

Explore a mysterious alien world in this peculiar polygon adventure from Delphine. Taking the role of Lester the scientist, the player is transported - as a result of an experiment gone wrong - into an alternate universe where nothing is what it seems. Joystick controlled with relatively little interaction between characters, Another World is a flawed, but brave product.

Although there aren't that many problems to solve and actually the interest in the game is more connected with the look than the feel, it's still a worthwhile purchase.

Overall, it's an impressive game. It's got plenty of drawbacks but on the whole, it scores a big plus. For players looking for a new angle on the arcade adventure genre and in particular anyone who has a stronger interest in new graphic styles than the depth or longevity of their game, it fits the bill perfectly.

☆☆☆

BABY JO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Loriciels**

Imagine Mirrorsoft's *Brat* in two dimensions and you've got a good idea of what the latest import from French firm Loriciels is all about. Or if you don't know *Brat*, try imagining *Mario* with a nappy-wearing babby as the main character. It's all really rather ludicrous, with the teeny toddler having to eat the bonus goodies as he bounces along the landscape in order to keep fit - but he mustn't eat too much, or he'll mess his nappy! I mean come on! What are these French games designers on? Something pretty strong if the quality of Baby Jo's aesthetics are anything to go by. Poorly designed sprites, atrocious music and hideously jerky backdrops are all proof of Baby Jo's naffness, but it has to be said that it is kind of cute in a rather perverse and definitely strange sort of way.

But if there's one thing it certainly isn't, it's fun - the slow, annoying gameplay and hastily thrown-together design makes sure of that. It's for precisely this reason that Baby Jo should only really be on the shopping list of platform freaks desperate for a new fix - and even then there are much more playable options available.

☆☆

BARBARIAN II

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Psygnosis games have historically always been visual treats held back by some less than excellent games design. However, with *Lemmings* that all changed and the company justly earned themselves a reputation for being able to turn out top-notch software of both high visual standard and demanding gameplay.

And for a moment it looks as if Barbarian II may be another title in the Lemmings vein. Unfortunately, this is patently not the case, since once the player has got through the obligatory loading sequence (a whole disk's worth) it becomes clear that Barbarian II is neither a vista of beauty for the eyes, or a particularly great place to explore with a joystick.

With left-right scrolling with paths leading into and out of the screen, objects to collect, weapons to horde and monsters to despatch, Barbarian really doesn't offer the player anything new, and has been carried off to much better effect in both *Gods* and *Torvak the Warrior*. Shame.

☆☆

BATTLE ISLE

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

As strategy games get trendier and more diverse, with the likes of *Populous, Mega lo Mania* and *Sim City*, the latest from French firm Ubi Soft represents something quite different, which we hardly see any more these days - a wargame in the classic vein. It's set on a far-off world where two armies do battle for control of a series of islands. It's vaguely similar to the old SSI wargames - units move in turns across a battlefield broken down into hexagonal zones. More experienced gamers will know the sort of thing.

Due to the space-age scenario, the units involved consist of all manner of high-tech tanks, planes, ships and armoured vehicles as well as more conventional infantry battalions. Players move their units about, creating tactical formations and assaults, with the inevitable confrontations between opposing forces. As the battle goes on, units must be resupplied, tactics altered and all the other guff that goes along with a game of this type.

Battle Isle's most favourable option is the two-player mode - something that's woefully missing from a lot of strategy products these days. A handy split-screen display allows two mates to play head-to-head - although this does mean you can see what your opponent is up to at any time, of course.

Battle Isle is undoubtedly a fine and very 'deep' strategy game, and one that should appeal to anyone who likes the good old-fashioned ways of doing things, without all the interfering bells and whistles. But despite the game's accessibility, many younger players on the lookout for a brain game are more likely to steer towards the likes of Populous II. Good stuff, though.

☆☆☆☆

BIRDS OF PREY

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Well, it's been four years in the making, but at last Hawk - oops, I mean Birds of Prey - has touched down. But has it been worth the wait? Well... sort of.

Let's make no bones about it, Birds of Prey is an excellent flight simulator and, as the name suggests, there's no shortage of dogfighting action. On a technical level it's astounding, and probably its more impressive aspect is the number of planes you're given the opportunity to fly - no less than 40 individual combat aircraft!

Birds of Prey is much more the thinking-man's simulation - very much in the MicroProse mould - and not really the more simplistic, combat-orientated Interceptor-type affair that many of us were expecting. That said, it's not all just flying from waypoint to waypoint and falling asleep in-between. There's more than enough hard-nosed action to keep anybody happy. The 3D update is surprisngly okay, considering how much the program is having to juggle, but somehow it just doesn't seem like the result of four years' programming.

Ultimately, what you've got with Birds of Prey is a game that's tried to do a bit of everything and comes off surprisingly well at the end of it. If anything it leans a little too far towards the technical side of things (reading the manual is an achievement in itself), but nevertheless Birds of Prey comes wholeheartedly recommend to all flight-sim fans.

☆☆☆☆

BREACH 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

Though there's nothing particularly special on offer for die-hard RPG fans this month, the follow-up to the highly-successful Breach is worthy of their attention. Set in the future with the player in command of a team of space marines, it's more strategy than role-playing, but the mix of the two genres is an appealing one. Probably the best comparison is with that old favourite *Laser Squad* - Breach 2, however, boasts a considerably more sophisticated approach, with a smart isometric viewpoint, much easier command control and more involving missions.

In each mission scenario, the player leads his team through enemy territory, exploring rooms, collecting objects and doing battle with the alien hordes they encounter. In the classic RPG tradition, characters can be tooled up with a huge array of weapons and equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and bombs, and all the characters come complete with individual attributes and abilities.

An added boon is that, should the player get bored with the multitude of missions available, they can create and edit their own. How many gamers will want to expend this amount of effort (designing a playable mission on any kind of game is no easy task) remains to be seen, however, and you may want to ask yourself if you're ever likely to make use of the feature. But there are enough predesigned missions to make Breach 2 worthwhile even without the editor, and on that score the game should at least be on the 'take a look' list for all RPG/strategy afficionados, if not a definite purchase.

☆☆☆

BUGS BUNNY CRAZY CASTLE 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Kemco-Seika**

Who the Hell is Honey Bunny™? I must be getting old, because I don't remember Bugs™ ever having a soppy girlfriend. It sounds to me like a lame excuse to rehash the old 'girl kidnapped by witch who must be rescued by hero' scenario to me. In this case it's the hideously ugly Witch Hazel™ who's the wrong doer (now her I do remember), and who has whisked Honey™ away to her castle. Bugs™ must rescue her by hunting through 28 huge rooms of platforms, pipes, ladders and Looney Tunes™ characters. Bugs™ must find the hidden keys in each to unlock the door to the next room. By picking up bombs, axes and so on Bugs™ can blow up those darn 'Toons, hack his way through blocked passages, etc, etc .

Although it looks like a platform game, Crazy Castle 2™ actually plays more like a puzzle game. Success is down to using the items you pick up along the way to get past certain obstacles at the correct place and time. And this part of the game is quite fun.

It's the platformy element that ruins the game - Bugs™ moves in big chunks and is hard to control, and all too infuriatingly often you lose a life by bumping into the baddies by accident. Despite it's good graphics, in my opinion Crazy Castles 2™ is a right stinking load of old Crap™.

☆☆

CAPTAIN PLANET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Action**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Pass the lentils, man. Thanks. Yeah, like I was telling you there's like this guy, right, and he's like this sort of super-hero, you know. Goes around saving the world from these real heavy breadhead polluters. Yeah, like you say. Heavy shit, man. Anyway, he's got these five helpers, and they're like just kids, you know, but they've got this special rings that give them these cosmic powers. Totally amazing. Each level of the game like centres around one of these six characters, and they're just far out.

I mean like the first character, Ma-Ti, uses her ring to like chill out the bad guys and regrow plants so she can climb up to the level exit. Yeah, and like when she gets out there's this helicopter she has to fly around in and scoop up endangered elephants and take them to a sanctuary. Yeah, exactly. It's like this amazing mix of platform game and shoot-'em-up. Mmmm, yeah, the graphics are sort of cute, the scrolling's fine, and the tunes are neato, but control over your little sprite guy's a bit tricky. Yeah, Tricky Dicky. Watergate. All The President's Men. But you get used to it and all in all it's quite a far-out experience, if not the slickest thing like you've ever seen. Lots of really pretty psychedelic colours, too.

☆☆☆☆

CASTLEVANIA IV

Price **Super Famicom £49.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Konami**

I couldn't believe it when I loaded this up! Imagine it's Christmas (not that difficult really). You're really looking forward to getting a certain present, and you've laid the ground with lots of heavy hints to your parents. Then, on Christmas morning, you get a wrapped gift that looks the same size and shape as the the thing you want. Trouble is, when you open it up there's something totally different inside. Oh, it's a nice enough present all right, just not the one you wanted. Well, that's Castlevania IV. It was great on the NES, brilliant on the Gameboy and, along with CapCom's *Super Ghouls n' Ghosts*, was one on the big anticipated releases on the Super Famicom.

To be fair, Castlevania's a decent enough game - there's lots of running around platforms, ladders and what have you, lots of wopping the bad guys with a giant mace. Unfortunately, what there isn't lots of is fun. The graphics are garish, and the animation is merely perfunctory, with the hero having a rather unfortunate shuffling walk that makes him look as if he's got rags tied to his feet and he's trying to polish the floor. If this had appeared before *SGn'G* then it might have received a better reception. As it happens, it didn't, so it hasn't.

☆☆☆

CELTIC LEGENDS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

It's amazing how you can tell, 99% of the time, what an RPG game is going to be vaguely like just by knowing what part of the world it's coming from. For example, anything that comes from California is likely to be all complex and involved, while anything from, say France or Germany, while still having all the traditional FRP elements, always tends to present things in a much more simplistic and arcadey manner. As is the case here, with this little Gallic number which is very much in the same vein as Thalion's *Dragonflight* and countless other Euro RPGs.

It's actually a fine little game, based around all the old RPG cliches, but handling them with traditional French style and aplomb. It's all set in the mythical world of Celtica, where the misuse of magic by an evil sorcerer has wrenched the kingdom in twain.

What follows is a mix of strategy and conventional RPG elements presented from a number of viewpoints - on the battlefield, high above the world itself and so on, depending upon the scene.

Though in gameplay terms it offers nothing that seasoned fans of the genre will find particularly earth-shattering, it's different enough in terms of presentation and style to make it well worth investigating - especially for novice gamers who may be looking for an accessible and appealing introduction to the genre.

☆☆☆☆

CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Cast as an aspiring Centurion, it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact that the player starts with just a single legion of soldiers and a city of citizens to keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy, the player can take part in chariot races and keep taxes light. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores become bigger and better. If the player's lucky he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Poor old Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if you're looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than this.

☆☆☆☆

CHOPLIFTER 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Nintendo**

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via

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Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as super-crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the waving refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing at times as you're a proverbial sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and machine-gunning planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited number of bombs with which to protect himself. And that's really all there is to it - however, like *Defender*, Choplifter is one of those games that, once played, is never forgotten. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆☆

CISCO HEAT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

In the light of a whole bunch of driving games, some of which have been nothing short of excellent, (*Lotus 2, Grand Prix*) Image Works' launch of this rather dreadful title couldn't have come at a worse time.

Not only will the consumer have had his fill of driving in general, but he will also be fully aware that it's possible to produce auto-action games a thousand times better than this.

The aim is to race a souped up police car through the hilly streets of San Fransisco, avoiding taxi-cabs, trams and skyscrapers in an attempt to emerge as the top cop driver in the city.

Quite aside from the 3D routines which make *Turbo Outrun* look polished and some astonishingly dull courses, Cisco Heat stalls at virtually every corner. The races themselves are painful and frustrating, the crowd graphics are basically a single graphic block duplicated to fill the space, the police car crashes into skyscrapers only a fraction larger than itself, and the corner turning routine, however brave the attempt, is a catastrophe.

Mind you, the sound of the car's horn is quite good.

☆

CIVILIZATION

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

American games design guru Sid Meier, fresh from his success with the brilliant *Railroad Tycoon*, has surpassed himself with this latest effort, which can truly be said to boggle the mind in terms of depth, scale and scope. Adopting the same functional top-down presentation format of *Tycoon*, the game charges the player with the task of building a civilisation, from a bunch of primitive settlers in an unexplored, uncharted world, to a global empire capable of space travel, nuclear power and the other trappings 20th Century life.

The range of factors and elements that play a part in the game is quite simply awesome, as the player's people advances and expands, founding cities, setting sail across the water, making technological discoveries and building armed forces - all while computer-controlled 'rival' empires do the same. Along the way the player must set taxes, maintain civil order, negotiate with other nations, care for the environment and take part in various arms and space races.

Civilization is undoubtedly the most involved strategy game ever conceived, and as such many less commited or novice gamers are likely to be swamped by the game's maze-like intricacies. For those willing to invest the time and effort, however, Civilization pays off like no other. Wonderful.

☆☆☆☆☆

CONAN THE CIMMERIAN

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Role Playing Game**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The problem with Conan is that he doesn't really know whether he wants to be a serious game or a funny game. The opening sequence is a mixture of pratfall comedy and intended menace, accompanied by some of the most awful music I've ever heard. (While some people may argue it's fashionably dissonant, I reckon it sounds like the twangings of a Fisher Price "My First Guitar" being played in the bath.)

Anyway, the curious mixture of semi-plan view exploration and side-on hacking works reasonably well, with Conan looking every inch the super-hero he's supposed to be. And there's plenty to explore.

Even the adventuring side is pretty good, and Conan can interact (albeit on a pretty basic level) with every character he encounters.

So if you feel that there is space on your shelf for yet another revenge-quest game, and can live with the atmosphere-crushing laughs, it may be worth a look.

☆☆☆

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say 'Inspector Wexford' the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it's be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large, fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e. 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immediately from place to place. As a user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns, walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of five (count 'em) game disks. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

DEATHBRINGER

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Empire**

There's this sword, right. These evil wizards have magically given it the ability to absorb the souls of anyone it slays. Their intention is to use it to get rid off their goody-goody though thicky-thicky nemesis Karn, a barbarian so stupid he can't even spell his own name right. However, luck isn't on the wizards' side, and the sword finds its way into Karn's calloused hands. Hardly believing his luck, Karn sets out to give the sword back to the wizards - in style. Basically it's all a thinly-veiled excuse for a sideways scrolling bloodfest of hacking and slaying, with Karn plowing through wave after wave of bizarro monsters.

Deathbringer boasts some of the most impressive parallax-scrolling backgrounds yet seen, even if they are somewhat lacking in colour. The sprites are well-drawn with a nice line in humour, but they're rather garish in a monochromatic sort of way. But despite its good graphics and adequate sound, Deathbringer's real problem is that it's basically a bit dull. The combat moves are limited in range and slow to implement and just wandering along, end-

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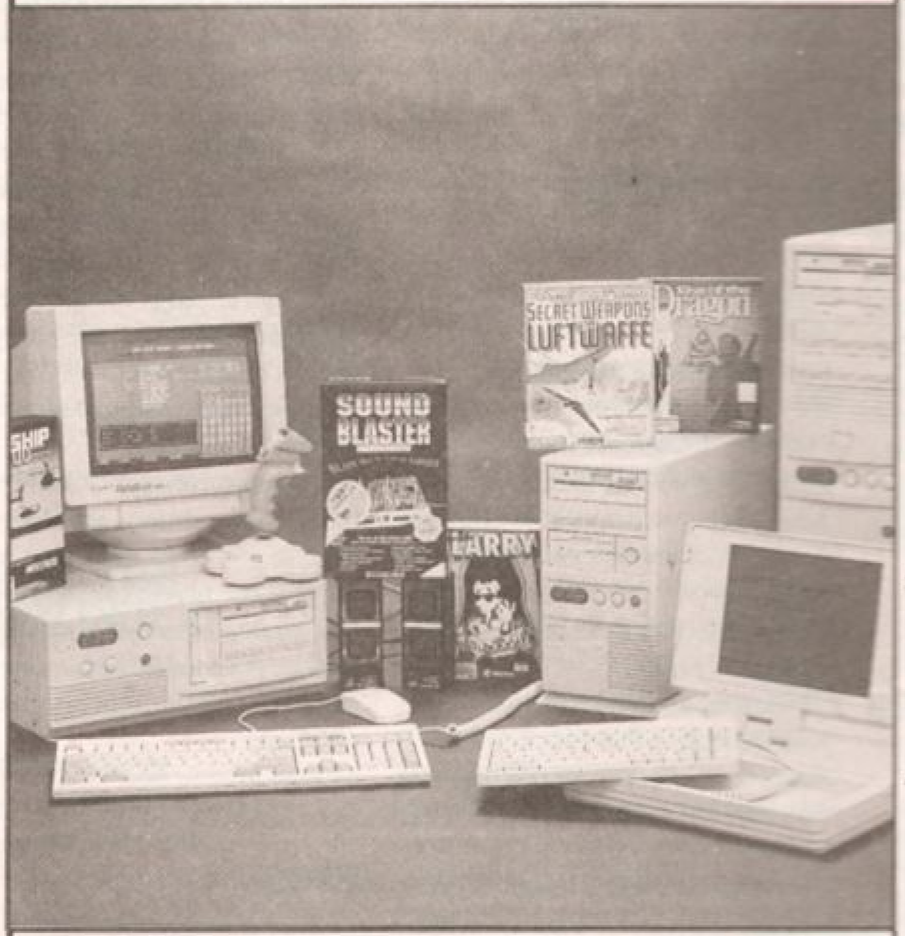

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lessly plugging away at the baddies, is not all that interesting. And the prettiest backdrops in the whole World can't make up for that. *Barbarian III* this ain't.

☆☆☆

DEVIL CRASH

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Tecno Soft**

Computerised pinball has never been a particularly popular genre - and a quick glance at Devil Crash is enough to make you see why. Ever since the age-old days of *Slamball* and *Time Scanner*, coin-ops and home machines have tried to emulate that seedy tilt-n'-slam pinball feel, but with little success. In theory, it should work excellently, with the binary format allowing for all sorts of tricks and wizardry that wouldn't be possible on a real machine. Unfortunately, no amount of gimmicks can make up for the fact that pinball on a computer screen just doesn't compare to the exhiliration of a real table.

To its credit, Devil Crash actually does a better job than most, with credible ball inertia and plenty of interesting features - the table is some three screens long and packed with all manner of secret rooms, bonuses and other bits. Unfortunately the gothic nature of the graphics (pentangles and mystic runes aplenty) lend a rather depressing and messy feel to the game itself, and as a result it's difficult to really enjoy. Devil Crash is the aesthetic equivalent of a bad headache. Whatever its shortcomings, however, computer pinball has acquired a respectable cult following for itself, and gamers of that persuasion will no doubt find Devil Crash to be one of the more impressive examples of the genre. For the rest of us, however, there are more enjoyable - and less frustrating - bits of plastic on the market.

☆☆☆

DEVIOUS DESIGNS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Image Works**

Hmmm, not so much devious as simply fiddly. Ever since the world went *Tetris* mad, there's been a steady trickle of arcade puzzlers trying to tap into that elusive addictive ingredient that made Alexey Pajitnov's classic such a wallet-filling money spinner. Devious Designs had more potential than most, but it hasn't quite been realised.

The basic idea is simple enough. The player guides a tiny figure around various landscapes, picking up variously-shaped blocks and trying to slot them onto a transparent template, whilst collecting bonuses, a myriad of power ups and avoiding or shooting the swirling bad guys. All well and good. Ah, but there's more to it than that. On the later levels, the player can make his character walk up the walls and even on the ceiling. And this is where it all starts to fall apart.

Control over the player's character is generally fine, but when near a wall it's all too easy to find yourself clambering up when you didn't want to and not clambering up when you did. Admittedly, given a fair deal of practice the player should be able to compensate for this fiddliness, but in the short-term it mars an otherwise enjoyable and reasonably addictive addition to the genre.

☆☆☆

DOUBLE DRAGON 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Storm**

Double Dragon fans have been more than short-changed in the past by the conversions of the previous two Double Dragon coin ops, so it comes as some relief to be able to say that this - the third instalment of the on-going fistycuff escapades of Jimmy and Billy Lee - is, despite a couple of reservations, pretty much what devotees have been waiting for.

The plot is confused to say the least. According to who you listen to, it's either the usual girly rescue mission, or a quest for treasure, or a fight against the 'Ultimate Evil'. No matter - the mechanics remain the say. Jimmy and Billy Lee (a.k.a. players one and two) have to fump and crump their way through fourteen levels of action set in five exotic locations (and as the game progresses you'll discover 'exotic' is an understatement).

Players start the game with fifteen 'coins', and in the shops found en route the player can buy extra lives, weapons, power ups and even some fancy new fighting moves. It's a shame you can't just find weapons along the way, but this coins business does at least adds a game-enhancing strategy element, because the player has to decide how best to spend his cash.

While some may find the gameplay dated and repetitive (a complaint, to be fair, that could be made about most games of this type), those eponymous 'fans of the genre' should be revelling in one of the more exciting and certainly the slickest slices of beat-'em-up action around. And, for my money, it's far better than *Final Fight*.

☆☆☆☆

E.A. HOCKEY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Like *Kick Off* with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with *John Madden's Football*, EA pull yet another winner our of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on! Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd better be ready to put your fist where his mouth is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like! A graphic and gameplay marvel, E.A. Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!

☆☆☆☆☆

ELF

Price **Amiga £25.95**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Ocean**

As Cornelius the Elf, it's the player's task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

Each massive maze-like level presents its own unique set of problems to solve and tasks to achieve, requiring that the player constantly evolve new strategies to deal with them. All in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp, perfect for platform or arcade adventure fans.

☆☆☆☆

EPIC

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

Boy, has this one been a long time in the making. I can remember magazines breathlessly previewing this about a year and a half ago (and I think ACE was one of them). It's strange that it should finally appear around the same time as EA's *Birds of Prey* (see this months Review Directory), another game thought long lost in the Bermuda Triangle that is known as software development.

Anyway, it's here now so what's it like. Well, to be frank, it's a tiny bit disappointing. The last remnants of the human race are all bundled up in a fleet of space ships, fleeing through space to escape the sun which is just about to go nova. The only escape route lies through the heart of the hostile

Empire of the Rexxons, a vicious reptilian race of aliens. As pilot of Earth's Tip Top Secret starfighter, it's up to the player to see the fleet to safety.

This plot forms the framework for the game's eight missions, some of which take place in space, the rest of which take place on the surfaces of various planets. Although depicted in super-smooth solid-polygon 3D (courtesy of Digital '*F-29*' Image Design), the emphasis is fimrly on shoot-'em-up rather than spurious simulation.

Depending on how the player performs in the various missions, the plot varies accordingly, but it's very limited and never really deviates from the linear path. Epic is all very exciting - the sheer scale of some of the space battles is stunning - and control over the ship is superb, but you can't help wishing there was a little more to the game than just blowing everything up. A touch more depth and this would have been a classic. Still, if you're looking for a high-class, no-nonsense 3D blaster then Epic's your game. Personally, I'm holding out for *Epic 2*.

☆☆☆☆

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **SSI/US Gold**

The first Eye of the Beholder, along with its inspiration *Dungeon Master*, can largely be thanked (or held responsible, depending on your view of this genre) for bringing RPGs spluttering and staggering out of the darkened bedroom of the anorak-- and glasse-wearing social retard and into the bright daylight of critical acclaim and public acceptance.

This style of RPG banished forever the notion that these games should only consist of functional graphics and reams of statistics, depicting the action in detailed 3D graphics, with all the number-crunching handled by the computer rather than the player.

Beholder 2 continues the tradition of the first, being good to look at, easy to use and - most importantly - fun and exciting to play. To be honest, the real improvements over the first game are few and subtle, and it's still a shame that the various beasties son't have a few more animation frames lavished on their attack animations, but that won't put off the fans keen to resume their adventures in the land of Darkmoon, nor should it deter newcomers from making their first trip. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆☆

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Simulations**
Publisher **MicroProse**

MicroProse make a departure from their usual rigorously-accurate sims with this action-orientated affair. It's the flight sim equivalent of the Janet and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with no complications. Players have six combat arenas to choose between, each with various missions to select. These missions are nearly all simple 'get in, destroy a couple of targets and get out alive' jobs, with the player have to simultaneously defend against swarms of enemy jets. Control is via keyboard, joystick or mouse and is highly responsive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough but there are quicker 3D routines about - it's more than adequate for the job in hand, however. Sound is disappointing, with a white-noise hiss being being the player's only audio companion for most of the journey. In the gameplay department this is a winner, with plenty of white-knuckle action to get the adrenalin pumping. Veterans may bemoan the game's lack of depth, but anyone else should find this just their cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy Dodger in the saucer to boot.

☆☆☆☆

F-22 INTERCEPTOR

Price **Megadrive £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

The first "real" flight simulation to arrive on Sega's 16-bit baby is, as many might expect, a whole lot more simplistic than comparable products on computer. The drill is pretty much routine - strap yourself into the cockpit of your prototype fighter and kick some butt over a series of increasingly-dangerous missions.

Because console controls are far more limited than those available on com-

TNT

MONKEY ISLAND 2

As you probably know by now, this will be the last, if you will, "ish" of dear old ACE Magazine: This rather terminal fact was not known at the time TNT was printed where, as some may remember, it says that Part 2 of Monkey Island 2's tips will be printed next month. Obviously, this isn't going to happen. So, never one to leave its loyal readers in the lurch, here's the final part of the complete solution...

PART 3: LeCHUCK'S FORTRESS

Once at LeChuck's fortress, walk along the path to the right and keep walking right (thru the tunnel, NOT the back tunnel) until you get to the dungeon. Talk to Wally then go to all the signs. Look at the spit-encrusted paper and write down the lyrics of each verse. Now enter the back tunnel thru the right side and look at the first verse. (Mine said, though others may differ, arm connected to head, head to rib and rib to leg.)

If you look at the first three parts in order they are arm, head, rib. Find a statue that matches that description (i.e. arms on top, head in the middle, rib on the bottom). Push it and walk to it. Do the same for the next three verses.

Eventually you should end up at a huge door. Open it and walk thru. Get the key, whereupon you will be captured and tortured. Now use the straw on the green drink. Spit at everything in the room continuously. By now the spit should've extinguished the flame. (For a laugh just wait and don't do anything.) Now light a match...

PART 4: DINKY ISLAND

Look at the sign. Go to the still, pick up the martini glass and use the glass on the still. Look at the barrel and get the cracker. Talk to Herman but don't bother answering his questions. Give the cracker to the parrot (he'll give you the first direction). Take the bottle from the water. Take the crowbar that's near the barrel and crates. Now enter the jungle.

Find the pond and pick up the rope (it's around the box). Open the box then take the dynamite. Find the tree with the bag hanging from it, use the bottle on the tree and use the newly-broken bottle on the bag. Pick up the cracker mix and use the glass containing the distilled water on the mix. Got to where the parrot said to go, i.e. head east from the pond (use the phone for fun) then give him a cracker and follow the next direction. Now give him the last cracker and follow his directions and you will be at the X.

Use the shovel on the X. Now use the dynamite on the hole. Use the crowbar on the rope. Use the rope on the twisted metal at the top of the hole. Now Governor Marley will arrive, but the rope will snap. Once you've hit the ground find the lightswitch just to the right of the very middle of the screen. Use the switch (BOO!). LeChuck will appear and try to banish you with a voodoo doll. When you reappear LeChuck will try again. When he stops doing it so frequently go to the storeroom and get a bottle of root beer, a Kewpie doll and a balloon.

Now go to the First Aid room, take dad's head. Open the wastepaper basket and take the syringe. Then open the drawer and take the gloves. Find the room with the grog machine and use the balloon and gloves on the helium tank. Then use the coin-return slot on the grog machine. Now wait, and when LeChuck comes into the room he'll bend over to pick up the penny. Quickly pick up LeChuck. This will cause Guybrush to take his underwear.

Make your way to the elevator and press the CALL button. Go into the elevator and use it a couple of times. Eventually LeChuck should appear the lower level. When the doors open he'll try to use the doll on you. Just use the lever and his beard will get caught in the closing doors. When the doors open again, get the beard. After having explored the ever-familiar sidestreet, go back down to the lower level and look for LeChuck. When you find him you must be very quick. Give him the clean white hanky that Stan gave you. He'll use it, give it back to you and zap you.

When you reappear try to use dad's skull, the hanky, the doll, the underwear and the beard scraps in the Juju bag. Now you will have a voodoo doll pulsating with power. Find LeChuck and use the hypodermic needle on the doll. LeChuck will leave, so follow him and use it again. Use all the selections given (for fun). If you rip off the doll's leg then you win. Now get ready for a weird ending...

THE END

OR IS IT?

puter (no keyboard you see), F-22 doesn't offer all the technical bits and bobs featured in your average Microprose product. What it does do, however, is play surprisingly like a "real" simulation, given the limitations of the controls. When playing from one of the outside views, it may look like just another version of Afterburner, but it really does play properly, with cannons and missile targetting all working realistically.

Considering it's a console game, F-22 Interceptor is a pretty remarkable achievement, and EA deserves to be congratulated for making the effort to produce something a bit more taxing (both for the player and the machine) than just another two-player shoot'em-up. If you're used to what computer-based flight simulations can do, it's unlikely you'll be impressed by what F-22 Interceptor has to ffer. If you're not, however, and you're a bit fed up with the standard Megadrive arcade drudge, you could well be onto a winner here.

☆☆☆☆

FACE OFF

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher **Krisalis**

There aren't that many Ice Hockey games available on the Amiga. In fact, there aren't any. So Face Off is something of a welcome addition to the canon of sports games. Worth getting? Well, yes and no. Like *Manchester United Europe*, it's a very polished game, with some super slick menu and option screens. There's a league to participate in, where the player can do anything from train the players to rename the manager. And like *MUE*, the player can turn off the arcade game and concentrate on the managerial side of things if they're that way inclined, or alternatively just play the arcade game alone.

The arcade side of things is okay, although some may wish the action had just a touch more zip. Certainly compared to *E.A. Hockey* it's distinctly sluggish. Control is simple and easy to pick up - shoot, pass or thump via the joystick - and the sport is fun, especially when things get a little physical and the fists start flying. As standard on most sports games these days there's a replay function so that that blistering goal can be replayed again and again. Overall, Face Off is a rounded package, though unlikely to exactly grab the public's imagination. Fans of the sport will enjoy it, but just how many of them are there in the UK?

☆☆☆☆

FATAL REWIND

Price **MegaDrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis/Electronic Arts**

Psygnosis disappoints nobody with its first foray onto the 16-bit consoles, maintaining the same high quality of graphics and sound that's made it the legend it is in the Amiga market. And thankfully in this case there's the gameplay to back up the visuals. But if *The Killing Game Show* had to be renamed for its transition from the Amiga to the MegaDrive, couldn't they have come up with something a little better than Fatal Rewind? Apart from the fact that it doesn't actually mean much, it's a fairly obvious attempt to sound like *Total Recall*, a film which bears no resemblance to this game at all.

The player is put in charge of a mechanical walker reminiscent of the ED-209s in *Robocop*. An agile little thing, it can run left and right, jump, fire and even climb up the sides of walls. Things they can do nowadays, huh? The player has to negotiate a network of platforms in the hunt for the exit to the next level. Aliens fly on from all sides, swirling and swarming about the screen with the sole intent of seeing the player bite the dust. And just to give the player a touch more incentive to escape the platforms are slowly sinking into a deadly red sea. The need to find keys to certain areas adds a small amount of depth to the game, but these arcade adventure elements never swamp what is basically a very classy and addictive shoot-'em-up.

☆☆☆☆

FIGHTER COMMAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

It may be a little late to cash in on Operation Desert Storm, but there can be no doubting Fighter Command's topicality. Set in the present day Middle East, it puts the player in the shiny shoes of an allied air commander who's been given a simple task - kick the stuffing out of the aggressive enemy as quickly and violently as possible. But despite the pretty picture of a jet pilot coming into land on the box, there's not actually any flight-sim type action in the game at all. It's 100% pure strategy, with the player making all his decisions from a series of control rooms, screens and offices. Everything is presented by simplistic overhead camera views, tactical screens and radar displays.

Everything you'd expect from a military strategy game is in there - you sweep the area with reconnaissance satellites to find out where everything is, then organise and launch attacks against chosen targets. There's a wide range of kit available, including stealth bombers, fighters and helicopters from various air forces along with exocet, patriot and scud missiles. As the game progresses, the player has to keep tabs on political developments, fuel and equipment resources and all kinds of other factors which govern the game world.

Actually, considering there's rarely anything really exciting going on on-screen, Fighter Command does quite a good job of holding the player's attention. Most of the screens are static, nothing's really very immediate and it takes time to learn the basics, but despite all this it's still strangely compelling. There's plenty to do, lots of strategy to get the head round and generally it's all very jolly. The lack of any real flight action is a major setback, and it's because of this that many gamers may prefer to wait for Microprose's forthcoming *ATAC*, In The Works'd this month.

☆☆☆

FINAL BLOW

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Storm**

I actually went to a boxing match a couple of months back and people in the crowd were genuinely shouting "Hit him!" as if it was some sort of useful tactic which their chosen fighter should employ. One suspects those are exactly the sort of folks who spend more than a couple of quid on Final Blow in the arcades. Nothing wrong with the celebration of the noble art, and nothing wrong with having a right old clanging session in the process, but Final Blow has more to do with seeing who can hit Fire the fastest than boxing.

Although the players are endowed with plenty of moves and the ability to block punches, the speed of the game completely removes any sort of finesse which, after all, is what boxing is all about. Even Mike Tyson would concentrate on different areas of the body. Hit them in the ribs enough to make them lower their guard, and then go to work on their face. No such accuracy in Final Blow, since the flurry of computerised and human arms makes it impossible to see who's arms are who's. The result is a non-stop battle of stick-slamming frustration. About the only way to work out who's being hit is by watching the energy bar at the bottom of the screen.

So far as a coin-op conversion goes, it's a pretty good job, and in two-player mode it's alright for a laugh, but the original was far from perfect. Amiga owners may be wise to hold on for a more rounded game.

☆☆☆

FINAL FIGHT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In Metro City (loosely based on Noo Yoik) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.

☆☆☆☆

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FIRST SAMURAI

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

This is the way that arcade adventures should be made! Succeeding in producing a game with the steriod-power of Schwarzenegger and some puzzle-solving too, Image Works have come up with a winning formula.

The player must avenge the foul murder of his Ninja Master by chasing the evil Demon King through 24th Century Japan.

On top of all the regular hacking ans slashing that you would expect to find in an arcade adventure, there are Special Items, which can be used a little like playing a joker in It's A Knockout and can summon the spirit of your murdered Mage-mate to help you though some of the more tricky situations.

While it could be said that the last thing the world needs is another martial arts game or another collect-the-objects adventure, First Samurai carefully sidesteps the argument by blending both styles in an effective and appealing way, keeping both hardcore killers and those with more cerebral intentions happy.

☆☆☆☆☆

FLICKY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like Quasimodo, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scattered brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.

☆☆☆☆

FLOOR 13

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The myth that strategy games are boring has been well and truly exploded by a game that's likely to convert even confirmed trigger-addicts to a more staple and intelligent software diet. Floor 13 offers a new slant on the strategy genre by basing itself around a compelling scenario and offering gameplay that goes beyond the regular strategy framework.

Set in present-day Britain, it tells of a government-run secret police force that must avert scandals, wipe out subversive elements and generally protect the government from embarrassing incidents so that it doesn't fall from grace. As Director General of this corrupt agency, the player is solely responsible for its operations.

The game is played almost entirely from a single static screen of an office desk, onto which intelligence reports and newspaper stories arrive from the outside world and form the basis of the information which the player works from as plots and storylines unfold. Various sub-departments, such as surveillance, interrogation and disinformation are the instruments of the player's will, with shady agents tailing suspects, tapping phones, searching premises and even torturing and killing people to achieve the government's immoral aims.

The way in which the game reveals information as half-clues and red herrings mean that good detective work and thorough cross-checking of intelligence data is as important as the conventional strategic skills which are also required. It's all thoroughly absorbing, very realistic stuff, and comes highly recommended, even to those who can't normally stand strategy games.

☆☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **D&H Games**

Yaaaaaawn. Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against football - there's just something implicitly boring about management games of this type. Player Manager is the exception to the rule, firstly because it's so excellent and secondly because you got to play *Kick Off* with it, which made it doubly excellent. When faced with something like this, though, it's difficult to imagine anybody but the most desperate sort of gamer or die-hard footy fan actually getting any enjoyment out of it.

Technically of course, there's nothing to fault it, and the depth that the game goes into is commendable - you've got your league and cup trophies, financial problems, player injuries, team tactics, talent scouts, stadium management and all the rest of it. On the aesthetic side, however, nothing much seems to have changed since the days when these games were prevalent on the Spectrum about three or four years ago.

These days, however, the cheapo graphics and sound just don't cut it any more, do when something like this comes along it seems like a bit of an embarrassment, really. But of course it's the gameplay that counts and for what it is, Football Director is entertaining enough, and providing you're not expecting too much and willing to give the game some time, it should pay off handsomely. The wiser members of the computerised football-management fraternity will probably want to save their pennies for *Player Manager 2*, however.

☆☆☆

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Believe you me, you've never seen a racing game like this. *Lotus 2? OutRun Europa? Indianapolis 500?* Pah! They are but children's toys compared to the complete and utter excellence of Formula One Grand Prix, the latest and greatest game from the programming genius that is Geoff '*Stunt Car Racer*' Crammond. The graphics are truly amazing, with highly-detailed cars (complete with driver's helmet poking out of the cockpit) literally zooming around tracks lined with stands, trees, fences and cranes. The sound matches the visuals, with good use made of throaty samples for the engine.

But it's not just the quality of the graphics or the sounds that makes F1GP so special, it's the meticulous attention to detail that generates an authentic and involving Grand Prix atmosphere. Everything you'd expect to find on a Grand Prix circuit - stands, bridges, tunnels, etc - is there (and in the identical position they'd be found in real life), even extending right down to stewards pushing crippled cars off the track and engineer crews waiting in the pits.

The wonderful control over the car is the essential icing on the cake, with plenty of difficulty modifiers to make the game easy enough for Granny Smith to play or tough enough to bring Sterling Moss out in beads of sweat. Indeed, so good is F1GP that it earned itself an ACE Trailblazer and the honour of becoming the new Racing Simulation Benchmark. Good enough for you?

☆☆☆☆☆

FUZZBALL

Price **Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, this is a bit of class from the past and no mistake. Refreshingly free from pretension, System 3's latest is a simple yet hugely addictive platform affair. The player controls a bouncing ball of fluff that has to be guided around a network of platforms, collecting fruity bonuses. Enemy sprites, the Fuzzballs of the title, try to stop him. These come in four increasingly-aggressive 'flavours': green, purple, black and red. By repeatedly shooting them with his blob gun, the player can stun them long enough to knock them off the platform. However, if the player takes too long the Fuzzball comes to but even nastier than before.

As the player progresses through the fifty-odd levels more and badder Fuzzballs appear, unkillable monsters start bouncing around and the platform leaps provide an even greater test of the player's pixel-perfect positioning powers. Fuzzball is a classic example of 'simple being good'. The addictive, uncluttered gameplay and cute graphics make this an A-grade winner. And there's a right dreamy animated intro to boot. (Well, you've got to fill those big boxes with something, haven't you?)

☆☆☆☆☆

GALAGA '91

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**

Arrrrggghh! You filthy, wretched, sucking little alien bastards! Anyone who played the original *Galaga* in the arcades, or better still the BBC version called *Zalaga* from Aardvark will be thoroughly versed in the extreme temper tantrums the induced.

However, in these incarnations, the game had that elusive spark of sheer addictiveness that meant no matter how many times that nigh-on invisible alien bullet destroyed the player's craft and sent him back to the start of the level, it never became annoying enough to prevent the player returning.

Here, the likelihood of a gamer using up all his Continues is extremely remote. It's the sort of game that leaves you feeling so mad and impotent that you have to turn off the power in order to wreak some revenge on the buy-eyed fiends.

Nevertheless, a top-notch scrolling shoot-out this is. Not quite as good as the superb *Halley Wars*, but boasting an infinite number of levels (with simply an increasing number and ferocity of aliens) and some entertainingly learnable flight patterns, it's not bad.

It's basically the nth derivation of the Invaders/Galaxians theme with jazzier aliens and graphics.

The main problems lie in the fact that the player can only have two bullets flying on the screen at any one time, and the annoying habit the aliens have of circling at the bottom of the screen, killing the player who makes the mistake of thinking that he's satisfactorily dodged an attack.

☆☆☆

THE GAMES - WINTER CHALLENGE

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publsiher **Accolade**

This is, as our rad friends would say, mega-wicked! It appeared in the post, totally unexpected, and turns out to be one of the best games we've seen this month! Yeah, seriously! The player (or players - up to ten can take part) compete in eight winter sports - luge, downhill skating, cross-country skating, speed skating, bobsled, giant slalom, biathlon and ski jump. All the events are depicted in an effective mix of 3D polygons for the landscape (a bit like *Midwinter*) with sprites for the competitors and course scenery (trees, fences, etc). Sound is less impressive - on a basic PC the game is played almost in silence except for a between-game tune and a crowd cheer when a player completes an event.

The player views the action from just behind and above his on-screen alter-ego, therefore getting a good view of the action as well as an excellent first-person impression of speed. Each of the events is relatively easy to control and consequently very easy to get into. Like the Epyx *'Games'* series, success is dependent on timing and control rather than hammering the fire button, so it's very satisfying to play and makes shaving seconds off those best times more a matter of skill as opposed to physical stamina.

Despite its superior qualities, The Games may get a bit dull when played alone (a criticism levelled at nearly every game of this type). However, as a game to play with a group of friends it's near flawless - and that makes The Games a more than worthy purchase to play over this Xmas holiday period.

☆☆☆☆☆

GREAT NAPOLEONIC BATTLES

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

You've got to laugh. The shots on the back of the box tell all about a product like this. "Create new battlefield with over 150 terrain pieces" says the caption under a picture of some grass and bushes. "Franch infantry advance on Reves" says the one under the picture with some green squares with crosses on.

But if you're sniggering, you shouldn't, because impressions certainly know how to put together a top-notch historical wargame, even if they can't draw graphics to save their lives.

Great Napoleonic Battles offers the player the chance to become Napoleon himself, or the commander of one of the unfortunate territories to fall under his control.

Impressions games are war/strategy games in their truest sense operating on a hex grid, with all the hit-point ratings and defence abilities displayed in their ugly numeric forms, but they are sure to keep happy the gamer who simply wants a machine to do the adding up and look after all the imagination, sound and action in his own head.

☆☆☆

GUNSHIP 2000

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the company's earlier mega-hit *Gunship*, which has gone done in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just *Gunship+*. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvelously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel.

The 'copter control is good, but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes Gunship 2000 not the sort of game to cut your sim-playing teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.

☆☆☆☆☆

HARD DRIVIN'

Price **Lynx £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **Atari**

The Lynx catalogue of software keeps getting bigger and bigger, and - more importantly - the quality of the games keeps getting better and better. Hard Drivin', a conversion of the Atari coin-op, is a case in point.

Potential buyers expecting or hoping for *Pole Position 3* are going to be disappointed - this is a pretty successful attempt to simulate the controls and performance of a 'real' car, and as such it's slightly more difficult and much less forgiving to drive than yer usual arcade auto.

The action takes place on one of two courses, a Speed Track and a Stunt Track (complete with jumps and loop-theloop). Once these have been tamed the player can try racing against the Photon Phantom.

The graphics and sound are nothing short of incredible, accurately reproducing the look and feel of its coin-op Big Daddy. Along with *S.T.U.N. Runner* this is a real showcase for the power of the Lynx.

It takes a little while to get used to Hard Drivin' on the Lynx - the joypad is a poor substitute for a wheel - making the going tough at first, and some may find the difficulty combined with the lack of immediate pulse-racing thrills boring. However, once the player has got the hang of things they should find Hard Drivin' remarkably satisfying. Recommended.

☆☆☆☆

HARD NOVA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Hard Nova's a game that's difficult to categorise. Like *Starflight 2* it's a mixture of styles, boasting strategy as well as role-playing elements, adventure as well arcade space-flight sequences. It's the sort of stuff that Electronic Arts in America have been churning out for years - science fiction odysseys with alien worlds, sleazy mutant characters, big spaceships clanging together and all the rest of it. There's supposedly a comic edge to this one, with the player taking on the persona of wisecracking space bitch Hard Nova.

You can interact with characters, RPG-fashion, collect objects, do missions and trek across the galaxy, kidnapping, ferrying cargo from planet to planet and so on and so forth.

It sounds like a bit of a cop out, but if this sort of malarkey is your cup of tea, then you're liable to have a lot of long-lasting fun with it - it's just a shame that the vast majority of gamers don't have the patience to get into it. Well worth checking out - the game's got plenty of atmosphere (ho ho!), and gets progressively more involving the longer it's played. Just don't expect to pick it up straight away.

☆☆☆

HARE RASING HAVOC

Price **PC £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Disney/Infogrammes**

Phwoar! The idea of a game based around Who Framed Roger Rabbit's stunning cartoon opening sequence does indeed sound like one tasty prospect - but sadly, Disney has realised little of its great potential in this rather dull little game.

On paper at least, it sounds like the cartoon's outrageously-frenetic spirit has been captured. Roger's been entrusted with looking after the accident-prone Baby Herman, and must ensure nothing happens to him while his dragon-like mother is out of the house. But Herman's disappeared to the local dairy to sample their milky wares, and Roger must track him down before any harm comes to him.

Sounds like fun? Don't let appearances be deceptive. The only thing that Hare Raising Havoc manages to do is infuriate the player beyond measure with its unfriendly control, illogical puzzles and repetetive gameplay.

On each of the screens thar Roger encounters, there's a problem to be solved, which involves manipulating the surrounding scenery and objects . To be honest, it's not very taxing and the player more often finds himself fighting agsinst the unresponsive control and slow, drudgy animation than actually getting to grips with the puzzles. With the Disney Sound Source connected you get samples of the original movie characters' voices and SFX - but these quickly become every bit as annoying as the game itself. Only diehard Roger Rabbit fans need apply.

☆☆☆

HEIMDALL

Price **Amiga (1Mb) £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Core Design**

After a long string of shoot'em-ups and platform games (*Car-Vup, Frenetic, Chuck Rock*), Core Design has returned to more involving territory with Heimdall, an isometric arcade adventure cum role playing game based around Viking lore.

The Heimdall of the title is a human gift from the Gods, sent to Earth by Odin to recover the three great weapons that will vanquish the forces of evil. After selecting a crew from the varied characters available, Hemidall sets sail across the Nordic waters to destinations unknown.

For the most part, the game is yer basic isometric adventure à la *The Immortal*, although there are some interesting strategic and FRP elements - all the characters have differing skills, which means that the player must switch between them, as in a conventional RPG, to perform certain tasks. The strategy is provided by the seafaring section, where the player must travel between the various islands (there are three archipelagos, each hiding one of the ehtereal weapons and each forming an independent level) in the most efficient manner.

Heimdall is a fun adventure game, although the action, due to the product's FRP overtones, is a little slower and less exciting than most of its counterparts in the genre. In fact, there are times when very little seems to be happening at all, and only those who are willing to buckle down, make maps and all the rest of it, are likely to enjoy the game to the full.

That said, it's been designed with the utmost care and cleverness, and there's enough here to kep anybody glued to the screen for some considerable time. A fine game.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUDSON HAWK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

Bruce Willis' film was a disaster, and Ocean hadn't turned out anything of note in the film conversion stakes for quite a while, so nobody was really expecting very much out of Hudson Hawk. But instead of the usual cynical and barely-playable licence, what we got was the best platform game so far this year. Special FX took a big gamble in its interpretation of the film by chucking 99% of the source material out of the window, and getting on with the business of just building a good game around the film's basic premise - that of a cat burglar stealing valuable artifacts from around the world.

It works superbly, in much the same style as former platform classics like *Mario, Rick Dangerous* and *Switchblade*, with small, comical characters playing over tortuously-designed platform levels. It's a class act, without a doubt, with fiendish traps and pitfalls lurking around every corner. The gameplay is easily up to console/arcade standard, and the graphics and sound really do enhance the fun factor because they're so jolly. Don't be put off by the shoddy licence connotations - Hudson Hawk is a brilliant game in its own right and deserves a place in your collection. Today.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUNTER

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's already awe-inspiring style. A winner.

☆☆☆☆☆

THE IMMORTAL

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

It's over a year now since The Immortal appeared to great public acclaim on the Amiga. A masterpiece of animation and game design, it was probably responsible for selling a fair few 1Mb upgrades. At last it's made it's way on to the PC, and now features a couple of new enhancements that make it any even better game.

The majority of the game is identical. The player guides a superbly-animated wizard on his travels around an isometric-3D dungeon. As he progresses around the corridors, he discovers treasure, traps and - of course - terrifying monsters. In the original Amiga game, the fairly complex combat took place at the same scale as the rest of the game (i.e. small) and it made judging responses to the opponents lunges and feints a touch difficult. On the PC, however, when combat occurs the view switches to a close-up that makes things far easier.

The only gripe from a PC owners point of view is that having been spoiled by the recent plethora of 256-colour games, the 16 on display here are a little disappointing. However, this doesn't seriously detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and recommended without hesitation to anyone who fancies a bit of dungeon n' dragoning.

☆☆☆☆☆

JIMMY WHITE'S

READERS PAGES

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'WHIRLWIND' SNOOKER

*Price.***Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of *IK+* and *Dropzone* is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics, none of them have really had any element of realism, until now.

The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in on so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no apparent reason or going off at peculiar angles.

Two player games are the best, but four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.

☆☆☆☆☆

KNIGHTMARE

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Knightmare, based on the children's TV series of the same name, can best be described as *Captive* with new graphics. The similarities are hardly surprising - both were written by Tony Crowther, the man who has been responsible for more games than Mr Waddingtons.

And, as anyone who has played *Captive* will realise, this is not such a bad thing. The action is depicted in bitmapped view-down-the-corridor 3D, with the player able to move around the puzzle- and monster-strewn labyrinths with ease. It's not partiuclarly original or ground-breaking, but anyone who enjoys a good RPG - and *Captive*, in particular - will be more than happy with this.

My only aerious quibble is whether kiddy fans of the TV show will find its slightly cerebral nature appealing.

☆☆☆☆

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

A worthy successor to the excellent *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, this game has a number of interesting differences to its predecessor. For a start, it's a better one-player game, but not so good for two players. Technically superior to the original, there's nevertheless something just a little bit lacking. Perhaps it's the removal of the laps system, or perhaps it's the fact that crashing into the other cars really doesn't do you that much damage. But whatever, it ain't quite as good.

However, it IS a great deal better than 80% of the driving games on the market, and there's a Link-up option allowing up to four players to race at once. The action is fast and furious and the control the players have over their cars has been greatly improved.

Players must blast their way through a selection of stages, each boasting a particular hazard, whether it be natural.(snow, rain, sand) or man-made (enormous juggernauts rumbling across the road). Graphically superior to the vast majority of similar titles, Lotus just looks the business, with flashy trackside obstacles and a high level of detail on the cars themselves.

Despite being hampered by some aggravating deceleration whenever the player drives through any water and the flawed two player mode, Lotus 2 is a pretty impressive game.

☆☆☆☆

LAST NINJA 3

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, well, well. After everyone has been shining up their shoes at the prospect of giving System 3's much touted, much lorded and much delayed conclusion of the Ninja series a right old kicking, the bleeding thing turns out to be great!

Applying a more arcade-adventure angle to the tried and tested Ninja formula, the boys at the System have produced a game which has all the visual appeal of the first two games in the series and none of the problems. Well, that's not quite the case, but instead of the game relying so heavily on the fight routines which, to be honest, were never that good, the emphasis has been moved onto the puzzle-solving element which isn't half as hard to implement.

Spanning an epic quest across a bunch of different zones (earth, air, fire, water and void) the game continually throws up different puzzles which the player must solve in order to reach the next stage.

Aside from completing these puzzles, there's a fair amount of rucking to be done too, and the collectible weapons add enough novelty to ensure that even when the player is doing over his twelfth adversary of the level, he'll find something new to do.

Graphically, the game is really rather special, with the isometric landscapes at a stage which must surely be approaching the state of the art, and the animations of the characters themselves being undeniably fine. Just look at the speed blur on that.

☆☆☆☆

LEISURESUIT LARRY 5

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Sierra On-Line**

He's Larry Laffer! She's Passionate Patti! And they're in a whole lot of trouble! Leisure Suit Larry 5, the latest instalment in the impossibly successful adventure series chronicles the spying adventures of America's favourite lounge lizard.

In what promises to be the most sexy adventure in the series, the player must guide Larry and Patti through a world of porn and mobsters in the quest to keep good honest smut on the airwaves. Initially taking the role of the audition host of America's Sexiest Home Videos, Larry quickly becomes embroiled in a hairbrained underworld plot to get all porn off the normal market and drive it underground where enormous profits can be made.

It's all pretty standard point and click stuff, but this time the player alternates between the very different personas of Larry and Patti, allowing both to get into sexy scrapes and also avoiding and particularly severe cries of "Sexism!" from bendy liberal wets.

Again, the hand-painted 256-colour graphics and game design are an excellent splint for what occasionally lapses into a bout of pretty lame gags. However, this time Larry does have moments of absolute brilliance, and the continual promise of a further saucy pic of a top spy in a saucy pose is enough to keep you coming back for more. No? Well, please yourselves.

☆☆☆☆

MAD TV

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Rainbow Arts**

My, what timing! Only weeks after the big TV franchise debacle and as the country quakes in dread at the threat of a load of old Spanish comedies and crappy game shows filling our screens, Rainbow Arts produce a game which is all about running your own TV station! If only the geezers at TV-AM had the chance to play Mad TV, they might still be in business.

Not only is Mad TV a right laugh, allowing the player to have total control (with the only limiting factor being the budget) over an entire TV station, but it's an excellent strategy game into the bargain.

The aim is to keep Mad TV at the top of the TV ratings while simultaneously winning the heart of Betty, the most beautiful woman in town. Taking place in a huge skyscraper, the game has the player's character haring around from the various offices, buying up films, scheduling programs and keeping an eye on the all important viewing figures.

Every now and again, your boss will crop up and give you some helpful pointers. He may be keen that his station win an award for poncey art films, so it's up to you to schedule accordingly. Now all of this would be a good enough hoot on it's own, but when you consider that Mad TV is a pretty excellent strategy game with complicated interrelations between various departments and some top notch presentation to boot, you would have to conclude that you'd be mad, ha-bleeding-ha, to miss it.

☆☆☆☆

MAGIC GARDEN

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Good God! Whatever next. Having been plagued for months by an apparently never-ending stream of ceramic gnomes, we were understandably keen to get our hands on the game which they promote. And what a peculiar concoction it is.

In his endeavours to become 'the most efficient gnome', the player must guide a gnome around the eponymous magic garden doing, well, this is where it becomes a little bit unclear actually. He can do pretty much whatever he fancies. He can water the flowers. He can mow the lawn. He can use some magic seeds and fly around on the back of a big dragonfly! But the gnome must be careful, for there are terrible traps which live in the garden like big flowers which can hurt him or tall grass which can slow him down.

And Gnomey had better be careful with the number of objects he's carrying, or he will become too tired and get hit by lightning and die. But the gnome won't get hit by lightning if he is exploring the underground caverns where the toilet is! Gnomey can flush the toilet for extra efficiency.

Presented in side-on elevation, the game looks, plays, smells tastes and is just odd. It's as odd as anything I've ever seen in my life. Peculiar Beatrix Potter style graphics and gameplay which quite honestly is tricky to imagine appealing to the masses make Magic Garden a true enigma.

☆☆

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM

Price **IBM PC £35.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Access/US Gold**

Once again a game pretends to be an 'interactive movie' and turns out to be little more than a simplistic adventure with flashy graphics and sound. But in Martian Memorandum's case the aesthetics are enough to make up for the game design's shortcomings - or at least they seem to be for the first few hours. The game uses digitised video footage, sampled speech and film quality music to set the scene (the story casts you as a futuristic private detective who must travel to Mars to track down the kidnapped daughter of a famous industrialist), and it works very well, creating a strong sense of atmosphere and involvement.

But as is so often the case with games of this type, the effect of these flashy gimmicks soon wears off and when you actually buckle down to play the game you realise that there isn't really that much to see or do. An ardent adventurer could easily complete it inside of a week, because the linear game design means that it's almost impossible to go down the wrong track - it's as if you're being guided by an invisible helping hand, and that's not very satisfying. Both *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* offer similar and more satisfying experiences, so if you've got the PC muscle to run so demanding a product, you'd be well advised to check either of those out instead.

☆

MEGAFORTRESS

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring. I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar?

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target. Unfortunately, for all it's gung-ho packaging and intent, Megafortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's Stealth Fighter series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, Megafortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, although it's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

MEGA LO MANIA

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Image Works**

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy *Populous* while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

Price **IBM PC £TBA**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Empire**

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon is none too surprisingly a sequel to *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from a mysterious set of ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the *Ultima* style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

MEGA TWINS

Price Atari **ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

There's big trouble in the land of cutey things. A dark shadow, etc, etc, has fallen across the land, and it's up to the two sweetest and most unthreatening warriors ever to grace computer software to save the day. At its core Mega Twins is a platform game - one or two players guide their cutesy heroes through level after level of ledges and chasms, seeing off the attacking monsters with a lunge from their tiny little swords. Magic orbs can be found along the way that act as super weapons, which are particularly useful against the super-tough end-of-level nasties.

As a conversion of the CapCom coin-op Mega Twins is hardly startling, but it's competent enough. Apart from the slightly turgid pace of the action, the main thing that prevents Mega Twins from making any real impression is the lack of excitement. There are no real thrills on offer - the platform element is minor, and having to endlessly tap fire to jab the beasties into oblivion is hardly opening up whole new vistas of tele-visual entertainment. The

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final nail in the coffin is the fact that the whole thing is incredibly easy - a competent player will probably get half-way through the game on his first set of credits. Mega Twins had A-grade potential, but whether it's the fault of the original coin-op or the conversion it's actually turned out to be Meagre rather than Mega.

☆☆☆

MERCS

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

As if Megadrive owners hadn't had quite enough shoot-it-out blasts to keep them happy well into the next century, here's another chance to hammer the joypad. The player must team up with a bullet-headed mate and raid increasingly well defended enemy installations in your mission to rescue the President. Even the smooth top-down multi-directional scrolling and plentiful power-ups fail to elevate Mercs above the rank and file of shoot-'em-ups. Solo play is available for soldiers of fortune who prefer to go-it-alone (or who haven't got any friends) but the thrill factor of such missions is really pretty limited.

Equipped with initially weedy weapons, the over-muscled heroes must gradually work their way up the screen, picking off rebel soldiers both on foot or lurking in gun towers or jeeps. Extra firepower and strength replenishers can be had by destroying the numerous crates lying about.

Players can speed their progress through the frequently tiresome levels by jumping into a semi-burned out jeep and roaring up the screen. This bit is quite amusing, as you can run down the enemy soldiers or blast them with the jeep's in-built bazooka.

As well as the requisite end-of-level guardians (which here take the form of an assortment of military hardware - planes, helicopters, tanks, etc) the levels are reasonably well broken up with bigger foes in the shape of guntowers, machine gun nests and the like.

Aside from the problems thrown up when a game controlled by the joypad necessitates diagonal firing (the enemy troops always seem to attack on a diagonal) Mercs has a brace of other inadequacies up its sleeve. It looks poor, offers absolutely no originality and when played solo is a crushing bore.

☆☆

MiG29M SUPER FULCRUM

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Domark**

Improving on an already successful formula, Domark have done away with many of the longevity problems of their first MiG game and have set this game against an epic backdrop of conflict in southern America. Taking the role of the pilot of a United Nations controlled MiG, the player must launch himself into hostile airspace from a solitary allied-controlled airbase - his mission is to gradually erode the stinking rebel infidels' grasp on the area by blowing up their supply lines and destroying their fuel depots.

It's bizarre that the company most recently associated with not especially excellent coin-op conversions should turn out such a classy simulation, and as a result, it may be tough for them to find the right audience. Nevertheless, a classy product it is, with a bunch of external views and a flexibility of mission structure enabling the inventive player to try his hand at planning his own strategies for doing away with the enemy threat.

Also included in this game is an implementation of the real MiG's fly-by-wire system, an auto-stabilising device which prevents the plane from flicking around all over the place like a big girl's blouse. Most handy in combat.

Presented, surprisingly enough, in polygon graphics, MiG beats the competition on the ease-of-use front, even if it is a bit tricky to imagine it outlasting some of the more intense Microprose products. A winner.

☆☆☆☆

MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ISLES OF TERRA

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **New World Computing/US Gold**

"By my mighty sword of Zorak, I, Hagor Dragonbone, must smite the evil doom-legions of Krynn before the alignment of the six moon-worlds!"

Yes, well, you get the general idea. Might And Magic III is yet another delve into the much-explored realms of FRP gaming, this time coming over as a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *The Bard's Tale*. Is it just me or has the whole FRP genre been done to death so badly that there's just nothing new anymore?

This third Might And Magic outing would seem to support that argument, as apart from some very flashy VGA visuals and soundboard sonics, there seems to be very little new or interesting on offer, except maybe for that ever-persistent fraternity of die-hard RPG fanatics. As you'd suspect, the scenario is about as hackneyed as one is ever going to get, with some claptrap about returning the Ultimate Power Orbs (mmm, yes!) to the King. What that involves is selecting a party of dwarves, orcs, heroes, warriors and all that, and then wandering about fighting with dragons, collecting treasure and picking up clues.

The game itself actually is very pretty, but for the most part the adventuring is pretty slow and insubstantial. Considering, however, how conditioned FRP gamers have become, I doubt that anybody who's likely to buy it will be disappointed by what they find.

☆☆☆

MONSTER BUSINESS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Eclipse**

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, Monster Business is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get the the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help Monster Business rise about the pack and shine out as an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

MOONSTONE

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Mindscape**

What a conundrum this is. While experience suggests that games billed as being at all "zany" should be treated with approximately the same amount of caution as a drunken pit-bull with rabies, Moonstone isn't actually that bad.

The aim of the game is to travel across a mystic land, searching for the Holy Grail-like Moonstone and trying to ensure that no other swine gets his mitts on it first. Up to four players can enter the quest, each selecting a coloured Knight to control. And why, prey tell, are we controlling Knights instead of elves or goblins or something? Because Moonstone is all about fighting, that's why!

At frequent intervals, the frankly tedious travelling sections are punctuated with action scenes. While walking in a wood or dithering by a stone circle, the Knight will be accosted by a hostile creature. Here is where the novelty value of Moonstone lies. The combat is *incredibly* violent and gory. Although the gore can be switched off by squamish gamers.

All in all a mixed bag. It could have been a really great combat game, but there's too much wandering around to give it much instant appeal. Worth a look.

☆☆☆

NEBULUS 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like whatever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their Megadrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frustration threshold was, Nebulus 2 steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

NEVER-ENDING STORY 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Linel**

I've nothing against licences being close to their film origins - in fact, I positively endorse it - but when this is taken to such lengths that the game turns out as poor as the movie did then I have to draw the line.

Witness The Never-Ending Story 2. The film came and went at the cinemas with hardly a murmur of public interest, and unfortunately it's likely that the game of the film will suffer the same fate. The fact that the game's release trails that of the film by a good year or so is the final nail in its coffin.

It's a five-level arcade action romp. The first is a *Shadow of the Beast* style horizontal scroller, the second is a 3D chase, the third is a dull climb up the side of a tower, the fourth is a *Nebulus*-style platform affair, the fifth a *Wrath of the Demon*-style horse ride. As you can tell, it's positively sparking with originality. As usually happens with these multi-event games the individual sections are pretty weak in terms of gameplay(though moderately pleasant to look at). They're also quite difficult, and since death is frequent the lengthy gap between lives is particularly frustrating. Although well-presented, Never-Ending Story 2 can only be recommended to die-hard fans of the film. That's right - all three of you.

☆☆

OUTRUN

Price **Game Gear £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Sega**

It may be an oldy but it certainly isn't a goldy - at least, not in its Gear incarnation it isn't. Out Run is arcade racing action stripped down to its basics - the player has to drive a red Ferrarri through four stages, avoiding other traffic and those pesky stationary roadside obstacles. It's all against the clock, with the player being awarded precious extra seconds every time he completes one of the stages. And... er... that's just about it.

The impression of speed (achieved using good ol' colour banding) is fine, although the objects grow in an annoyingly coarse and chunky fashion. Unfortunately the number of roadsign objects is small, and the number of cars on the road even smaller - even on the hardest stage I only counted two other vehicles on the road at tops. Very poor. Worst of all it's ridiculously easy - I completed the game on my third go. Yes, really! The only real mark in the game's favour is the ability to play head-to-head with another Gear owner, but even then the thrills are few and far between. Not good.

☆☆

OUTRUN EUROPA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

At long last! A game that has become a legend, along with the likes of *Star Trek* and *Birds of Prey*, over the last couple of years, simply because it's taken so bloody long to come out. The original idea was to release the product to cash in on the wave of euphoria from the original *OutRun* conversion - which should give you an idea of how long we've been waiting for it. We ended up getting the offiical sequel, *Turbo OutRun* first, which wasn't much cop, and now we've got this, which isn't either.

The basic idea is that the player has to take charge of a variety of vehicles - car, bike and boat - as he races over various land-and-sea stages to deliver a vital package, while international agents are out to stop you. It's all a bit ludicrous really, and what's seemingly supposed to be a cross between *OutRun* and *Chase H.Q.* with extra knobs on is in fact a bit of a shoddy mess. The road sections aren't much fun to play because control of the vehicles is so bloody over-sensitive, and the enemy cars just keep on getting in the way in a way that isn't conducive to gameplay at all, but is just very frustrating. The boat bits don't even bear think about because they're so unjust and difficult, and 99% of players will probably put their foot through the monitor screen within five minutes of loading it up. Talking of loading, the constant disk accessing is a pain in the prostate, and it all hardly seems worth it when it's not even very clear what's actually going on in the game. There are far better race games available, so don't waste your precious time pondering over this one.

☆

PACMAN

Price **Game Gear £19.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Namco**

Well, what is there to say about the original arcade classic that hasn't already been said? Not much, except that it's now available on the Sega handheld and isn't bad at all.

There are no frills, enhancements or other features that would have been a mistake to add here. This is not Pacman 91 or anything rubbish like that, but the good old original, as it was all those years ago. The conversion is pretty much spot-on (which, given that the game hardly pushes computer technology to its limit is only to be expected), right down to the original colours and sound effects.

One change that has had to be made is purely a practical one - to preserve the original size of the graphics, the Pac-maze is now a four-way scrolling affair, with only a section visible on screen at a time. It works well enough, but it can be a bit of a pain at times, as it makes it difficult for the player to see where the remaining dots are, and where ghosts might be coming in from. Pacman veterans may find this annoying, but to us more casual players it's not too much of a bind. So don't be a silly boy - get this classic up and running on your GameGear today!

☆☆☆☆

PEGASUS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

Oh deary deary dear. What a shame that just when Gremlin starts getting a good reputation for itself with its classy product of late, it turns out a piece of tripe like this. Based very loosely on the classic Greek myth, Pegasus is a weird half-and-half mix of *R-Type* style shoot-'em-up action and run-along-and-chop-up-the-baddies platform stuff. This mixture of airborne and ground-based action is supposed to give the player variety and keep him interest. In practice all it does it get very boring very quickly.

In the shoot-'em-up section, Perseus (or Percius, as the box incorrectly spells his name) flies along on the back of the mythical winged horse, which is animated in an atrociously unconvincing manner, and blasts away at the attacking gargoyles, demons, harpies, etc. When he's survived this onslaught, Pegasus lands, Perseus dismounts and the ground section begins. This happens 50 times (25 air sections, 25 on the ground), by which time the player has probably torn all his hair out, kicked in the TV screen and lobbed his computer out of the window.

It's not that Pegasus is a bad idea - it's just that it's been executed in a such a God-awful lazy and unimaginative manner. The action in the horsey bits is sluggish and annoying, while the ground levels lack any of the finesse of, say, *Switchblade II*. The fact that there's lots of it doesn't make it any more of a viable purchase - unless you're a masochist of course. Complete with all manner of intolerable spelling mistakes within the game ("existance" instead of "existence", "new" instead of "knew"), Pegasus would have only just made the grade two years ago, or on public domain today. To ask £26 quid for it when it falls so horribly below today's standards of graphics and game-

play is a bit on an insult. Avoid.
☆☆

PITFIGHTER

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Domark**

If ever there's a prime example example of an excellent conversion of an average coin-op then Pitfighter is it. If you're an arcade goer then you're probably more than familiar with the game. With its giant monitor screen, three sets of player controls and stand-out digitised graphics you could hardly miss it. Trouble was, underneath the unique flashy visuals and meaty sound lurked a distinctly dull beat-'em-up, made even worse by the confusion caused by the grainy-looking graphics. Where's my bloke gone? Is he hitting me or not? You know the sort of thing. All in all, a less than rewarding experience.

In converting Pitfighter for the home systems, Teque London have actually improved it a Hell of a lot. Indeed, if you liked the coin-op, chances are you'll like the home game even more. The graphics, which have retained pretty much all of the flash special FX of the coin-op, are clearer, and the slower pace makes the game much easier to play. The joystick controls are a little uninstinctive, but it only takes a few goes to get the swing of things. But as good a conversion as it is, it still can't compensate for the fact that fundamentally Pitfighter's about as exciting as tapping a fire button all day. Which, er, in Pitfighter is pretty much what you spend all your time doing.
☆☆☆

POPULOUS II

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Awesome! One of the greatest games of all time just got considerably better. Bullfrog's long-awaited sequel is just so excellent that it's difficult to find the words to describe it. Basically, it's prety much the same game - guide your followers through a series of apocalyptic battles, God versus God, over countless isometric worlds.

From that point on, however, it's a whole new ball game. Whereas the original game had only a hadful of godly effects, Populous II has scores of them, many much more deadly than anything encountered in the firs t game. The plethora of extra features (road and city building, effects that interact with each other, experience points that build up as you progress) make Populous II a far more involved and rewarding experience than the original. Absolutely phenomenal stuff, Populous II is a game that you really REALLY cannot afford to miss. Buy it immediately.
☆☆☆☆☆

PUT 'N' PUTTER

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Import**

There's nothing like a good crazy golf game for a bit of handheld entertainment. And, as they say, this is nothing like a good crazy golf game.

Well, okay, so that's not strictly the case, but Put n' Putter is seriously flawed.

The major, indeed the only, real problem with the game is that it is simply far too easy. And by easy I mean the player (unless he's an utter imbecile) won't even get a whiff of a *Continue (Y/N)* screen until he has completed about twenty holes and has graduated onto the Expert level. While it's nice to get a little way into a game before grinding to a halt, this is ridiculous!

Aside from this, Put n' Putter does all the things a crazy golf game should, falling down in only a couple of minor places. The cursor moves rather sluggishly, and the courses could hardly be described as innovative. Worth a look if you're a really crap golfer.
☆☆

RAILROAD TYCOON

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

The ACE Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad

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empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage. Meier's excellent user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Highly recommended to all and sundry.

☆☆☆☆☆

REALMS

Price **Amiga/Atari ST £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Good grief! Just what, as *Amiga Power* so aptly put it, has Peter '*Populous*' Molyneux started. Yes, it's him and his merry band of programmers at Bullfrog who we have we have to blame for the proliferation of isometric-3D view strategy games.

It's timing that's the biggestproblem with Realms, the latest offering from Graftgold, previously best known for arcade games like *Paradroid 90* and *Rainbow Islands*. If it had appeared about four months ago, it might be recieved more favourably. But in the last few months we've had *Mega-lo-Mania*, *Utopia* and the sequel to the game that strated it all *Populous 2* (which rightly blew the competition away).One can't help feeling the software-buying public have probably had enough of these sorts of games by now, and if I had the choice between *Populous 2* and *Realms*, I know which one I'd go for.

The pity is that Realms is actually quite a good game. The player is a warlord in a pseudo-fantasy world, vying for power with a number of other equally power-mad warriors. The player tax his people, raise armies, lay siege to cities, the usual sort of thing. Imagine *Powermonger* with more depth but less impressive graphics and you get the rough idea. It plays well, control over the various components of your empire is well thought out, and the mix of strategy and action is balanced nicely. Trouble is, when you've been a God raining fire and brimstone on your people Realms comes across as Earthbound in every sense.

☆☆☆☆

RISE OF THE DRAGON

Price **Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Amiga owners have been scrambling to become the first to purchase this- the first or a new wave of Sierra games helmed by the perennially popular Dynamix team. But they should be warned. While Amiga owners get to enjoy just as many visual thrills and plot twists as their PC Pals, they pay the price of swapping ten (count every last one as it slips in and out of your drive for the umpteenth time) disks.

However, if you're willing to pay the access-time price, Rise is an extremely rewarding product. The player takes the role of a futuristic detective, a real Marlowe type, slugging his way through a drug addled city of sleaze, the last remaining obstacle between the mysterious Dragon and total control of the entire planet! Played in first-person perspective, the game uses the no-typing-necessary control interface which Sierra have made their trademark.

This is another example of the interactive movie deal which American companies are so fond of forcing down our throats, but for once it isn't too bad. There is actually a story here! And there is actually some adventuring to do. The player must investigate the strange drug-related death of the Mayor's daughter, interrogate scummy criminals and do all the other stuff that private investigators have to do. Wire taps, opening other people's mail, hanging out in low-rent strip joints. What a life.

And it's all in those lovely hand drawn graphics. Mind you... all those disks...

☆☆☆☆

ROBIN HOOD

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Millennium**

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millennium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in *Populous* style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sherrif of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sherrif has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.

☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOD

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Millennium**

And about time too. Computer owners have been waiting a long time for a platform game good enough to wave in the faces of the smug console owners, revoltingly proud of their *Sonics* and their *Marios*. And here it is.

Robocod wins few awards for its originality. There are elements of just about every running n' jumping game from *Manic Miner* onwards in there somewhere, but thanks to careful design and wise mixing and matching of game styles the end result is far more than the sum of its parts.

As in *Mario IV*, the core game task is simple - get from one end of the level to the other, and jump on the heads of any bad guys to wander past. Of course, in practice there's a bit more to it than that. Some of the 70+ levels see Robocod travelling through the levels in a bouncing car, a spluttering prop plane and even an old enamelled bath! There are even some areas where 'Cod swims around - much like he did in the game's prequel *James Pond*.

In fact, it's the sheer variety of the game - along with the superbly smooth control over the fishy main character - that makes it such a joy to play. Every level features something new, either in graphics or gameplay, and there's little chance of boredom setting in. The wonderfully cute sprites, bright and cheerful backdrops and sing-alongable tunes are excellent too. All in all, Robocod is a polished, playable and - thank God - *fun* slice of platform pie that you'd have to be criminally insane to let slip by.

☆☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOP 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

Robocop? In 3D? Nah, it'd never work - would it? Well, the good news is that it does! Indeed, Digital Image Design's unique slant on the *Robocop 3* movie licence arguably make it the best tie-in yet.

In essence, Robocop 3 isn't *that* different from almost every other film tie-in. It's an amalgam of several game sequences - a bit of shoot-'em-up, a bit of driving, a bit of beat-'em-up - where the simplistic gameplay is compensated for by the sheer variety on offer. However, in this case there's another factor - DID's ground-breaking solid 3D.

Rather than watching some sprites leaping about a 2D backdrop, the player views the world through Robo's eyes as he patrols the streets of Old Detroit on foot, in a police car and even in the air thanks to his new Gyropack. The atmosphere generated, especially in the foot patrol sequences, is quite unbelievable. The only weak links in an otherwise incredibly-strong chain are a couple of feeble hand-to-hand combat sequences with a robotic Ninja assassion - the combat moves are limited and the action sluggish.

However, those sequences apart, there are frequent occasions during the game that the player actually does feel as if he is taking part in a film. And at the end of the day, isn't that what you should be buying a film tie-in for?

☆☆☆☆

ROBOZONE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

Trying to hop onto the Green bandwagon (and missing by about six months), Imagework's latest and certainly not greatest puts the player in the driving seat of a giant two-legged war machine, a sort of cut-price version of the one in Psygnosis' *Killing Game Show*, with a mission to put an end to pollution. Hoorah!.

Fundamentally Robozone's a simple blast-anything-that-moves affair, with the programmers trying to maintain player interest by constantly changing the play style. One level's a side-viewed multidirectional-scrolling explore-n'-shoot, the second's much the same but in 3D and the third's a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up. While each is programmed well enough, there's precious little fun or excitement to be found in any of them.

The really annoying thing about Robozone is it's pretense to being 'Green' - the manual is littered with Top Tips about how to help save the environment. One states pompously: "If you have a choice, avoid buying packaged goods." Considering that Robozone comes in a giant box with a single disc and a thin manual rattling about inside, the irony of this statement beggars belief. Probably the best tip is the first one: "Try not to waste energy." Imageworks, having played this I already have.

☆☆

ROBOCOP 2

Price **Game Boy £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**

Hmm. A bit of an oddity this one. While the graphics are bigger and chunkier than before and the storyline follows the second movie as opposed to the first, you can't help but feel that you really have seen this all before.

The main problem lies with the best that Robocop 2 won't scroll backwards. This makes the supposed exploration of the various factories and warehouses in the game a bit farcical, since Robo can only explore the location which he comes to next.

Learning the pattern of hostages to be rescued, nuke to be destroyed and criminals to book will help, but it hardly solves the problem.

Still, it looks great and the sound effect and music are excellent. And let's face it, if you're going to get yourself a shoot-em'-up as a New Year treat, it's best to stick with the name you know.

☆☆☆

RODLAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Storm**

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (*Magic Pockets*) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith. Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.

☆☆☆☆

RUGBY - THE WORLD CUP

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Domark**

Hey! It's *Scrum Off*! Well, not quite, but it is a pretty blatant attempt by the Doms to adapt Anco's footy classic style to the rough n' tumble, if you will, 'world' of rugby. Of course, as any fule kno, rugby and football are very different sports, with the former lacking the non-stop speed of the latter. Not, then, perhaps the best game to try to shrink to fit into *Kick Off*'s hard and fast playing style.

However, as it 'appens, it all works pretty well. Sure, the action is a bit stop and start, but there is a definite flow to the game and few lapses in pace. The game is viewed in plan view, with the pitch scrolling to follow the player's... er... player (who is, natch, the one nearest the ball). Throws and kicks are controlled simply by the joystick, and it lacks the subtlety of *Kick Off* (no aftertouch here). Scrums are a case of frantically waggling the joystick to force the opposition back, and this is fine - unless you're playing the All Blacks, in which case you need to waggle a sub-light speeds to beat them.

In fact, that's probably the biggest criticism - the top teams are too tough. There are other minor niggles, such as the way player sprites overlap on top of each other and the way that the other members of the team don't put themselves in good positions to pass, meaning that play often revolves one-man rushes from mid-way down the pitch to the try line. But while Rugby may not be perfect, it's still a pretty good 'try'. (Cue sound of reviewer being shot.)

☆☆☆☆

SARAKON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the *Mah Jong* tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine *Snap* played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible. The result? The *Mah Jong* player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.

☆☆☆

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

Price **IBM PC £40.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed *Their Finest Hour*. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of the Second World War.

However, played in a *Wing Commander* style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate. Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation. Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from *Wing Commander* - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

SEVEN COLORS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Infogrames**

Tetris, the game that started it all, may be getting on a bit now, but there's always room for a new puzzle game on the market. The only problem is that the vast majority of puzzlers that have been washing up on these shores from America and Europe have either been of unbearably low quality, or just too weird to get the head round.

Seven Colors from Infogrames, a company that prides itself on its off-the-wallness, fits snugly into the latter category. It's played over a large board made up of hundreds of tiny coloured diamonds where the objective is to change as many diamonds to your colour, spreading them like a virus across the screen, faster than your opponent does. The first player to fill 50% of the screen area is the winner. It's difficult enough to understand when you're actually playing the game, so don't worry if you're a little foggy after that brief explanation.

In fact the major problem with the game is that it's not very easy to understand, and because things just seem to happen it's not very easy to keep track, or indeed to work out what's going on at all. The confusing situation is further compounded because the instructions hardly explain anything at all. Persistent players may well get something out of it however, and there's a variety of game options to spice up the action if they do. Oh, and there's some very nice in-game classical music which suits the nature of the game perfectly and is very soothing indeed.

☆☆

SHUTTLE

Price **IBM PC £49.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Not for the faint hearted, this one. As you've probably guessed, it's a simulation of the Space Shuttle. And the word 'rigourous' just doesn't even begin to do justice to the level of accuracy that developers Vektor Grafix have achieved. The cockpit is bewildering - all the player can see is bank upon bank of knobs, dials and levers, most of which work and have some effect.

The player not only has to fly the damn thing, he has to open up the bay doors and control the robot arms to deploy satellites and so forth. And this technical accuracy is backed up by some of the best 3D graphics ever seen. There's even a realistically and accurately mapped planet Earth that rotates and the star constellations are all plotted correctly as well.

As stunning an achivement as Shuttle is, the biggest problem with it is its limited appeal. Personally I think it's brilliant and completely absorbing, but I can understand that there might be some people who find the idea of twiddling all those dials more than a little off-putting. If that's because of the sheer daunting complexity of the whole thing then that shouldn't be a problem, because there's a whole range of player aids that make the game accessible to everybody, no matter what their sim proficiency. But there's no getting away from the fact that if your patience with sims ends at *Thunderhawk*, then you're likely to find little to interest you here.

☆☆☆☆

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Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Microprose**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. Silent Service II features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old *Above Us The Waves* stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

Microprose are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in *F-15 Strike Eagle II* would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆☆

SLIDERS

Price **Game Gear £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Import**

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! What are Loriciel trying to force upon us now! In the wake of the global mania for puzzle games, it seems that any old rubbish will do these days. Here we have Slider, a fat yellow thing who must trundle around a selection of mazes doing his utmost not to bump into the bad guys. Once Slider has travelled over, and therefore coloured in, each square in the maze, he moves onto the next.

Later mazes are made more hazardous by sliding platforms which will propel Slider into deadly situations.

A time limit prevents the player from being able to dawdle, or maybe consider his next move, and there are lots of squares which simply kill off Slider on contact. Terrific.

Far from being the sort of game to while away many a train journey, Slider is a pain in the arse of the first order, and deserves a place in absolutely noone's software collection..

☆

SOLITAIRE POKER

Price **Game Gear £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Sega**

Everyone loves a good puzzle game, and this is a very good one. The aim is simple - select a card from one of the four piles on offer, and place it on a 5 x 5 grid. Points are awarded for pairs, flushes, etc, created either vertically, horizontally or along the main diagonals. Score over a certain amount and the player progesses on to the next, tougher level. There are a number of variants on the theme, but that's the main thrust of the game.

What more is there to say about such a simple concept? Aesthetically it's fine - the functional graphics are clear and colourful and there's a vast number of background tunettes to pick between. Although not exactly using the full-colour LCD capabilities of the Gear to it's fullest, it's one of the most enjoyable Gear games I've seen for a long, long time, and as such comes with a strong recommendation.

☆☆☆☆☆

SMASH TV

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

"Good luck - you're gonna need it" screams the show's oily compere, and never have there been truer words said. This conversion of the incredibly violent Williams coin-op has translated surprisingly well to the home systems, with nearly all the blood and thunder elements so beloved of the original ported across faithfully.

The game takes the form of a futuristic game show, where one or two contestants armed with a rapid-fire gun slug it out with a seemingly endless parade of thugs, freaks and goons to win big money and prizes in a single-screen arena. Power-ups and end-of-zone bad guys add to the already phenomenal carnage.

On a purely visceral level, it's immensely satisfying as the plugged opponents explode into red gobbets of flesh. Indeed, the sprites are small enough to be almost anybody you want them to be, so you can imagine that you're shooting up endless clones of your boss if you want to. Very therapeutic.

As a single-player game it's fine, though there's a serious risk that boredom may well set in worryingly early. The two-player game, on the other hand, is something else. There's not been player-to-player shouting like this since *Kick Off 2*.

The coin-op's two joysticks (one to move, one to direct fire) have translated adequately to a single controller, though if you have two there is an option to use both which makes the game far better.

A superb conversion, and more than deserving of your hard-earned pennies. Go to it, you psycho you!

☆☆☆☆

STEVE MCQUEEN - WESTPHASER

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Loriciels**

You what?! Talk about a cynical licence! Not only is the poor chap dead and unable to defend himself against this sort of thing, but this game actually bears no relevance to the great man at all! Okay, so he was in a few cowboy films, and this is a cowboy game, but there the similarity ends. Don't expect to see any of Steve in the game - his involvement begins and ends with a tacky black and white picture on the box.

It gets weirder still. Because it has the word Westphaser in the title, you'd assume it's compatible with the Westphaser light gun. But oh, no. It's conventional mouse, keyboard or joystick control only. Just what on Earth is going on here?

Alright, so it's all very dodgy so far, but what of the game itself? Well, unfortunately things don't get much better here either, as what's on offer is a bog-standard Operation Wolf-style shootout set in a variety of typically Wild West scenarios. That might sound like at least a bit of a laugh, but the action is so stunted and dull that it's difficult to get even vaguely excited. To be fair, the graphics are quite nice in a funny French sort of way and there are some jolly touches (you can shoot the dresses off the women, for example), but it's hardly enough to justify financial outlay. Is that Steve himself I hear spinning in his grave?

☆☆

STRIKE FLEET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Strike Fleet doesn't look the most inspiring game from the shots on the back of the box, but the Lucasfilm credit hints that this may be better than it appears. As, in fact, it is. The game is a sea-based strategy game split into fourteen individual missions or a more-taxing eight-mission campaign. After each mission briefing, the player is allocated a number of points (depending on the difficulty of the mission) to 'spend' in the shipyard. Each ship 'costs' a certain number of points depending on its class, so the player must be careful in picking a balanced fleet.

Once at sea, the player can flick between the ships at will. Control is relatively simplistic (thankfully), allowing the player to steer, change speed, activate radar and sonar and, of course, fire the variety of on-board weapons. In addition, certain ships carry a complement of helicopter that can be sent on recces or sub-hunting forays.

Despite it's initially drab appearance, Strike Fleet actually turns out to be quite involving. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be had from successfully controlling the fleet, and seeing off the air, sea or underwater attacks provides frequent doses of adrenalin. Admittedly, those without a strategic leaning are unlikely to be converted by the game's charms, but if Strike Fleet sounds at least slightly appealing give it a go. I think you'll be surprised.

☆☆☆☆

SUPAPLEX

Price **Amiga/ST/PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle Game**
Publisher **Digital Integration**

"You're Murphy, bug-hunter extraordinaire, exploring deep inside a crazy computer. Snik Snaks must be avoided at all coasts, and falling Zonks will trap the unwary." Well, with an intro like that, you can resist? Supaplex comes a quite a refreshing change from a company that normally turns up heavy-duty simulations and plane-based arcade games - it's half puzzle, half arcade, a sort of weird hybrid of Boulderdash and Pacman. In each of the game's 111 levels, Murphy must snap up all the "infotrons" by whizzing about the four-way scrolling screen, gobbling up bits of the landscape and grabbing them when you find them. The trick is to eat the landscape in such a way that you don't send all mannaer of horrible heavy things crashing down on yourself. As the levels progress things can more complex, with warp gates, explosive devices and marauding enemies.

Okay, okay, so it's Boulderdash with knobs on, but it isn't actually at all bad. It may not look like much, but it feels nice and smooth and the simplistic action is strangely compelling. With plenty of options and well-varied levels, Supaplex is likely to keep you playing for quite a while - provided its simple charms manage to grab you in the first place.

☆☆☆☆

SUSPICIOUS CARGO

Price **Amiga/Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Gremlinn**

The pseudo follow-up to BSS Jane Seymour is a lot more enjoyable than its mediocre predecessor, primarily because it's a whole lot more accessible and has a pleasant sense of humour. We've classified it as an adventure here, but it's really a hotch-potch of many different game styles - there's a strong RPG element throughout and a sprinking of arcade-based sub-games along the way.

As maverick space pilot Jonah Hayes, the player's job is transport a highly dodgy shipment of genetic refuse across the galaxy in his rundown spaceship, the Lady Luck. Even something as simple as keeping the ship operational and on course is not as easy as it sounds, and things are naturally complicated along the way by a variety of unsavoury characters who want nothing more than to throw spanners in the works and prevent Jonah's cargo from reaching its destination.

I must admit to being a little perplexed by Suspicious Cargo - I mean, just what exactly is it? The way that it seems to flit between gameplay styles can be confusing, but despite this the storyline holds the disparate elements together well, and as such you end up with a surprisingly coherent and playble product. It's by no means anything groundbreaking, but it will be appreciated by anyone who fancies a good space yarn with a few laughs.

☆☆☆☆

TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES - THE COIN-OP

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

Now, let's get one thing straight from the outset, Turtles is neither the most complicated or involving game in the world. However, Probe's conversion of what could best be described as a fairly basic coin-op beat-'em-up is admirably close to its coin-gobbling dad, complete with all the regular Turtles and their opponents.

Catering for one or two players, the game leads the Turtles through a brace of increasingly dangerous screens, gradually leading up to a climax involving rescuing the glamorous April from a building, set alight by the evil Shredder.

Turtles suffers from two distinct problems. The first is that one feels Turtlemania is definitely on the wane, and there is no longer the public fever guaranteeing that anything green will sell by the bucketload. The second is that, despite Probe's pretty sound conversion, the game's quite easy, and even the coin-op itself wasn't that incredible.

☆☆☆☆

THUNDER BURNER

Price **Atari ST £24.99**

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Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Loriciels**

"Top arcade game with action, futiristic combats and super stress!!", we are promised. *Space Harrier* on the Spectrum is what we get.

Slogging his way through twelve stages of shocking 3D graphics, our intrepid hero must control his Transformer-like craft deep into the heart of enemy territory and destroy the evil aliens' Big Base.

Even painting a girl on the back of the box with her noughts out has failed to make Thunder Burner at all exciting.

Piloting the jet plane is actually more fun since everything moves at a faster pace, but the bi-ped robot has a better chance of destroying the pill-boxes containing, one presumes, dirty alien scum.

It's all a bit poor, and apart from some end-of-level monsters which are presentable enough, falls a long way short of even the most basic blast standards.

And if all that seems a little harsh, Loriciels can al least comfort themselves with the knowledge that they win the Most Gratuitous Tit Award. Hooray.

☆

THUNDERHAWK

Price **Amiga £30.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Core Design**

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks.

The game itself is broken down into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating target and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default if this seems to much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are smooth and move at a fair click, though there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim, then this is the game to change your attitude.

☆☆☆☆☆

TIP OFF

Price Amiga/Atari ST £25.99
Genre Sports Game
Publisher Anco

The fact that Anco's latest sports game comes from the keyboard of Kick Off co-designer Steve Screech has certainly attracted a lot of interest during the game's development, but now the final product's here it has be said that it represents somewhat of a disappointment.

The idea is fine - apply the same techniques that made Kick Off great, jiggle them about a bit to fit Basketball's smaller play area and rules and away you go. And indeed many of Kick Off's trademarks are in evidence here - the game's simple, instinctive, and very fast indeed. But (and it's a big but) it just doesn't work.. Basketball is a fast game, but Tip Off's interpretation of it is a bit too speedy for comfort. As a result it just doesn't quite spark in the same way as Kick Off, andso basketball fans would still be best advised to go with Cinemaware's version.

***

TOE JAM & EARL

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

Jammin'! Or, in Earth speak, oh dear. Toe Jam & Earl were presumably intended, like Sonic before them, to become 'cult' game personalities and thus attract a whole new legion of fans to the Megadrive. I don't know if they has or not, but on the basis of the game they're in I can't for the life of me see how they would. If Sega think this is what 'Ver Kids' want, then they're sorely mistaken.

It's a simple maze game. One or two players, controlling the far-out aliens of the title, have to travel around a number of exotic islands searching for the ten missing pieces of their crashed spaceship. Some islands are populated by monsters of various description that have to be avoided.

Along the way the gruesome twosome may find bonuses which will award them anything from speed-up trainers to a blow from a bolt of lightning. Mixed blessings or what?

And... er... that's it. Yes, really. All the game consists of is wandering around, very slowly. Boring really doesn't quite sum up the toe-curling tedium of the whole debacle. The only points of special note are the way the screen splits when Toe Jam & Earl get too far apart, the appealing nature of the two aliens and the well-funky music. Any chance of putting the music on CD, Sega?

☆

TRADERS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Linel**

If you imagine a hotch-potch of Utopia, Mega lo Mania and Populous, except in 2D, you'd be pretty close to understanding what Traders is all about. Again, it's a race for technological development and fiscal success, with up to four players battling it out on a mysterious planet, evolving robots and competing with the rigours of nature, as well as hostile advances from each other.

Distinct from lots of God sims and strat games of late, Traders has got a reasonably light touch and doesn't weight the player down with facts and figures. Instead it lets them explore their new world and get on with the business of exploiting and ruining it with the minimum amount of fuss.

While there's no question that the game boasts as much depth or longevity as any of the games mentioned above, Traders acts as a pretty solid intruduction to the strategy genre. Not too shabby.

☆☆☆

UNDER PRESSURE

Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Electronic Zoo

Oops. Funny how one minute you're on top of the world and the next you're, erm, not. A situation which top notch programmers Eldritch the Cat have found themselves in with their latest release, Under Pressure. Their last and indeed only release, *Projectyle* was exceedingly well received, being a pretty excellent sports sim, but Heaven only knows what gremlins and glitches are to blame for this disaster.

Styled in an uncomfortably similar fashion to Psygnosis games (the in-between level text is virtually identical to Psygy's game name text and the robot which the player controls looks exceedingly like the creature on the *Shadow of the Beast* box), Under Pressure falls down in almost every single respect.

Guiding a huge robotic killing machine through a bunch of decaying cityscapes, the player must duel with a myriad of different monsters - mainly snakes - with the impressive arsenal of weaponry available from his cockpit.

Sounds alright, doesn't it? Alas, from here on in, the game falls down rather badly. For a start, everything is far too big. The player's robot almost fills the screen, but doesn't have the detail or animation finesse to support its size. Also, the scale presents a problem in that since only one horizontal level of the city is ever visible on the screen, the game feels more like a duck shoot than an exciting adventure. Absolutely no aiming is necessary for shooting for the monsters either, as they just sit up and swallow the player's fire. Oh dear.

☆

UTOPIA

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Gremlin**

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another *Populous/Powermonger* style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want.

The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatorship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that never works, does it?

☆☆☆☆☆

VOLFIED

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast** .
Publisher **Empire**

Qix is back in town, and better than ever! No matter how widely tastes may differ among the gamesplaying fraternity, you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who doesn't enjoy a game of good old *Qix*. Its appeal is universal because it's so simple and addictive, and like *Breakout*, its gameplay has stood the test of time. What Volfied (converted from Taito's coin-op) represents is a 90s version of the original classic - it is to *Qix* what *Arkanoid* was to *Breakout*, keeping the original framework intact, but adding lots of pretty backdrops, power-ups and extra features.

For the most part it's much the same - draw boxes around the screen to fill up 75% or more of the screen area without the fusewire which makes up the line itself getting hit by any of the marauding enemies - which, instead of the old gyrating line, now takes the form of a giant mothership that roams about spitting about bullets, and a couple of pesky little helpers. Lasers and speedups are among the collectables, while high-tech backgrounds and SFX provide the aesthetic overhaul.

Since *Qix*-style games are so thin on the ground, Volfied, with its classy execution and uncluttered gameplay is a welcome addition to the software scene - and if you've got any sense and admiration for the classics, you'll add it your collection too.

☆☆☆☆

VROOM

Price **Atari ST £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Lankhor**

Without wanting to be nasty to our European counterparts, what with 1992 and all that, it has to be said that most of the software that crosses over from the continent is a bit smelly. Vroom, however, from French publisher Lankhor, has proven itself to be the exception to the rule. Although it's not a patch on the likes of *Indianapolis 500* or *Formula One Grand Prix*, Vroom is nevertheless a jelly supper racing game, boasting very impressive speed as the player vrooms his way (hence the name) around a first-person environment.

It's got all the usual fixtures and fittings - rear-view mirrors, pit-stops, overhead maps,bridges, dips and hills on the track, training modes, qualifying laps, choice of courses and some spectacular crash sequences. It's more ofa racing game than simulation, as controls and instrumentation has been kept to a minimum - there's nothing too much to worry about here apart from going very fast, avoiding the other cars and keeping on the road. And it works well enough, being very playable and actually quite compulsive, with the array of racing options adding to the game's longevity. The only dodgy factor is that the joystick option is restricted to the arcade mode - the more serious race options only allow mouse control. Very dodgy indeed. But apart from that, not at all bad.

☆☆☆☆

WILLY BEAMISH

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

The Adventures of Willy Beamish, to give it its full name, is somewhat of a oddity. Dubbed an 'interactive cartoon', it's sort of a weird cross between *The Wonder Years* and *The Simpsons*. Willy is the typical all-American troublemaking pre-teen schoolkid, complete with grubby hands, pet frog and accordingly stereotypical family. Strange things are afoot in suburb of Frumpton, and Willy must investigate.

Willy is yet another of those games that sounds a whole lot better than it actually is. That's not to say that it's bad, but the gameplay is very trial-and-error, with luck often playing more of a part than skill or judgment. As such, more time is spent restoring saved games than actually playing, and it can get quite frustrating at times, especially when you have to sit through the comical set-piece for the umpteenth time. As an interactive cartoon, it's excllent, with suitably stereotypical characters, some funny jokes and gorgeous visuals. As a game it's compelling, but not in a way that encourages real addiction or involvement. You're unlikely to come back to again and again.

☆☆☆☆

WING COMMANDER II

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Origin**

No matter what else you might say about the Wing Commander games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's very much a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship Tiger's Claw has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, Wing Commander II certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is 100% appropriate.

☆☆☆

WOLFCHILD

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Core Design**

Okay, okay, so it's just another platform game. What separates Wolfchild from the ever-growing crowd is the sheer excellence of its execution. Rick Dangerous creator Simon Phipps has surpassed himself once again, creating a game that has everything an arcade afficionado could ask for - incredibly fast-paced action, superb graphics, awesome pyrotechnical displays, a rollicking soundtrack and... ooh, lots more besides.

The plot tells of a brilliant genetic scientist kidnapped by a corrupt corporation to produce mutant killing machines for their own dastardly ends. The scientist's son, Saul Morrow, bungs himself into his dad's prototype gene-splitting machine and turns himself into Wolfchild, a half-man, half-beast character with special energy-spitting powers.

What follows is five levels of top-level platform cum beat'em-up action with Saul switching back and forth between his human and beastly forms to help him progress. When enough energy is collected, Saul becomes the wolfman character and is blessed with the power to fire orbs of electrical energy at the mutant hordes that continually attack him.

It might not be the most original game in the world, its supreme playabiulity more than makes up for any lack of real innovation. It's hard, fast and dangerous to know. Give it pride of place in your platform collection now.

☆☆☆☆☆

WORLD CLASS RUGBY

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Audiogenic**

Audiogenic have opted for a rigorous approach to the sport, offering plenty of accuracy and a great deal of scope for subtle play. And as such, it's somewhat more satisfying to play, if a bit harder to get into.

It's also a lot prettier, with play viewed from a 3D angle and all the players animate nicely if a little stiffly. If this doesn't appeal, there's a selection of other views on offer, including a no-nonsense top-down view for the more traditionally minded. World Class Rugby may not have Domark *Rugby*'s pick-up-and-play instant appeal, but it's a good bet that of the two this will be the one you'll still be loading up in a year's time.

☆☆☆☆

the blitter end

Ho hum. All good things must come to an end and all that. As you've probably already guessed this is the last time you'll ever read the Blitter, as this is well and truly the last issue of ACE Magazine. Yes, we know we threatened to kill the Blitter off before and didn't, but we really mean it this time. After this, Blitter is packing his bags and heading off for his long put-off, thoroughly well-earned retirement at his little cottage in the lake district. But before we sign off for all eternity, we feel it's only fair that you get what you deserve - one last top-quality dose of industry gossip and opinion. So eyes down for a full house and let's get on with it...

Following last month's report on computer games at last breaking into the big time courtesy of TV, Blitter is now even more thrilled to see that the likes of Sonic and Mario (if not really anything else) are gradually taking over the daily papers. However, we can't help but feel that, in their impressive attempts to sound ultra-enthusiastic about the medium, our comrades in Fleet Street may have gone just a teensy bit over the top. For a start, we find it difficult to believe that the Sunday Mirror's claim (February 9th) that Gamesmaster presenter Dominik Diamond "has more fans than pop stars." In the very same organ, the paper gave us a unique insight into the minds of computer games players by revealing the jargon they use - for example, we all know that "I had awesome kit and went total on a rad sim" is an everyday phrase amongst you kooky games guys. But however cringe-making some of the inaccuracies may be, you can't complain when the games are at least getting the coverage they deserve. With a second series of Gamesmaster being mooted and regular features in The Sun, Today and the Mirror, who knows? Soon computer games could be more popular than eating and having sex!

☆

For years, every man, woman and child in the industry has cowered in terror before the awesome presence that is ACE publisher Garry Williams. This month, however, the Blitter is pleased to bring that reign of awe and terror to an end, by revealing that the hulking publishing magnate is little more than a big cuddly soft touch. One of the Blitter's deep cover agents in the ACE office caught him ordering big fluffy presents of love for his "partner". What's more, he was later spotted engaging in pathetic giggly love-talk on the phone with her. What a weedy wet! If you would like to lodge an official protest, please send a postcard with the words I THINK WODGE IS A BIG SOFT NELLY to him care of the usual magazine address, preferably along with some of your own criticisms of his machismo. There's a special mystery prize for the most offensive one he receives.

☆

Blitter's heart goes out this month to Bullfrog Productions' Peter Molyneux who, on a recent trip to Japan, had a spectacularly unlucky time. Apparently he made the very foolish decision of accepting to go out on a "fun" pain ball day in the woods, playing agains the chaps from Login magazine. Wha poor old Pete didn't realise until it wa far too late was that the guns bein used in the game were EXTREMEL powerful - a fact that he only discovered when his hand was nearly blow off at the wrist by a direct hit from kamikaze Login journo. The woul later required stitches. To make matters worse, Peter tripped while tryin to escape and badly damaged his ankle resulting in a nasty limp for severa days afterwards. As Blitter is alway only too keen to point out, fame is no quite all it's cracked up to be...

Peter Molyneux enjoys a joke on the Japanese shooting day, blissfully unaware of the terrors that await him.

And so that's it. The end. Finis. Nothing out there now but neverending darkness and eternal void. Yes, it will surely be a sadder, less colourful world without the Blitter, but those are the breaks and that's the way it goes. To be honest, after 55 months of solid service, the Blitter is jolly glad to be out of this festering cesspool and into a quieter, better life. So we'll just make our excuses and leave. Dasvedanja comrades, carry on the struggle!

● Blit Blit!

FOR YOUR OWN GOSSIP

What with it being a bit of a slim month gossip-wise, we thought we'd utilise the remaining space by giving you the chance to write some gossip of your own. Perhaps you caught someone snogging behind the bikesheds or something. If so, this is the place to expose that scandal! All you need is a pen, so what are you waiting for? Get scribbling!

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Shadowlands - a completely new and unique role playing experience. The story is based upon ancient legend. A warrior prince, slaughtered on the battlefield of the Shadowlands, awakes to find that his spirit lives on and that he can control the minds and actions of his subjects. Seeking retribution, he chooses four loyal adventurers and guides them back into the Shadowlands on a journey of discovery and vengeance.

- The revolutionary new Photoscape TM lighting system casts atmospheric light and shadow over the gameworld.
- Fight to the death using an array of weapons and spells against hordes of grotesque and intelligent adversaries.
- A multitude of devious traps and perplexing puzzles tax your skill, intelligence and dexterity.
- User definable characters are controlled independently or in groups.
- In-game hints are always available (for a price) if you need them.

The friendly and intuitive mouse-driven control system gives access to the largest, strangest and most fascinating game world. It's an enormous challenge – but one you can win!

Whether you're an expert or new to the genre, Shadowlands is the RPG experience you've been waiting for.

Available on:
Amiga, Atari ST & IBM PC.

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Amiga Screenshots.

I've got no hesitation in awarding Shadowlands our highest accolade:-
DAVID UPCHURCH - ACE

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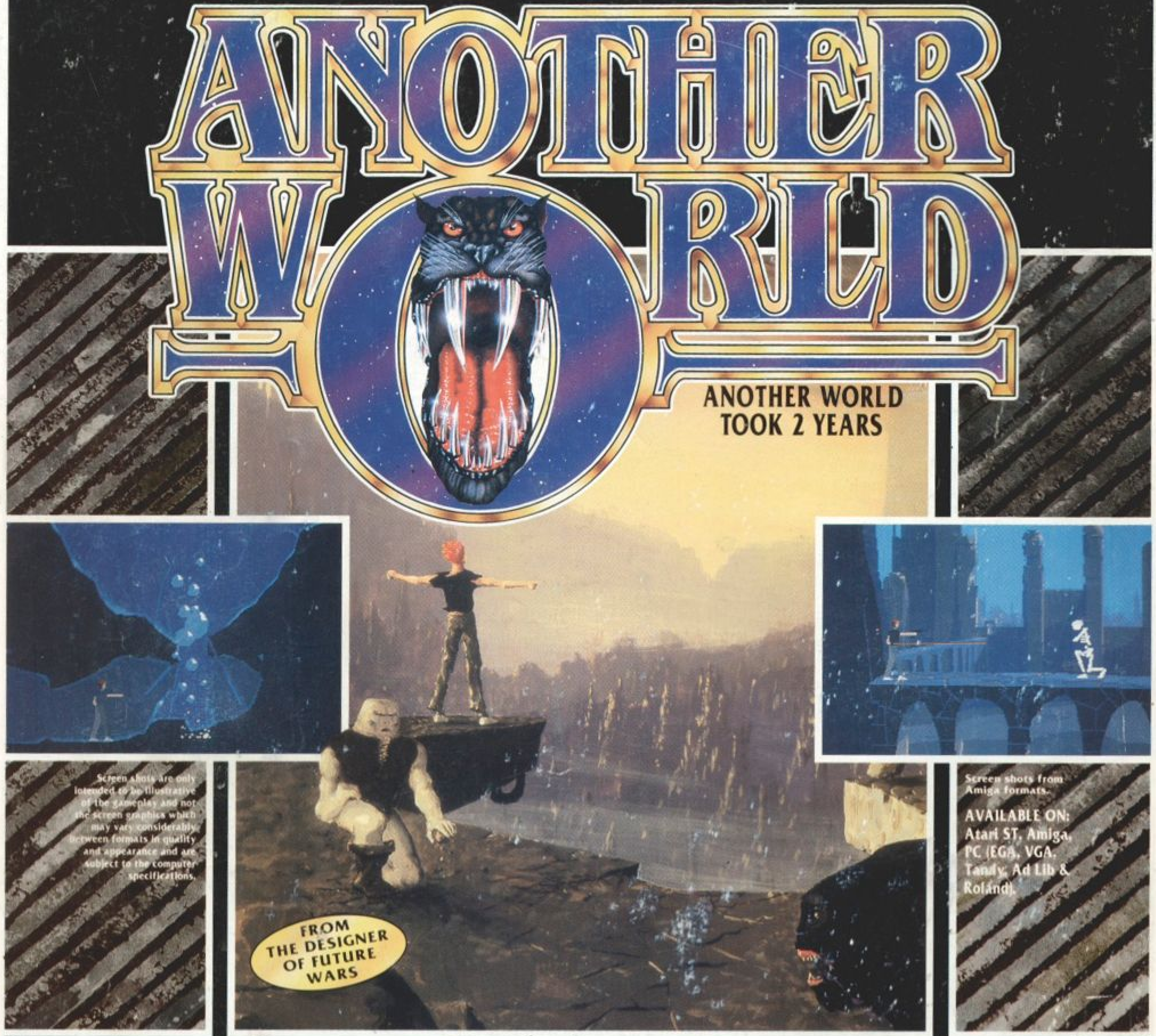
IT TOOK 6 DAYS TO CREATE THE EARTH



Screen shots are only intended to be illustrative of the gameplay and not the screen graphics which may vary considerably between formats in quality and appearance and are subject to the computer specifications.

Screen shots from Amiga formats.

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  - Zoom • Panorama • Close-up shots.
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